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"HE IS DEAD! MY GOD WHAT A DEAD SHOT THAT WAS!"

OR, The FATEFUL HERITAGE.

A Romance of Reality in the Sunny
South, Half a Century Ago.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "THE SCOUTS
OF THE SEA," "OCEAN TRAMPS,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.,

CHAPTER I.

THE CONCEALED PORTRAIT.

A STUDENT was pacing to and fro in his rooms at a Southern university; his face was clouded, and his lips hard set, as though some deep sorrow had fallen upon him.

He was a young man of twenty-two, but about him there was a certain repose and calm dignity which caused him to look several years older.

A man of splendid physique, with the carriage of a soldier, he was handsomely dressed, and looked like one who had been born to riches and refinement.

His face was a handsome one, the features being cast in a mold that was perfection, and he deserved the name he had won among his fellows as "the Adonis."

His rooms were luxuriously furnished, and there was in the sitting-room a piano, guitar and cornet, in the way of musical instruments, foils, pistols, rifles and boxing-gloves, for manly sports, and several bookcases filled with a library that was most varied and valuable.

Sketches and paintings adorned the walls, and over the fireplace hung a massive gilt frame, with the picture behind it screened by doors that were locked.

But, in spite of all of his fine surroundings, there was gloom upon the student's face.

In his hand he held a crumpled letter.

It was written in a feminine hand, and for the tenth time he halted by the window and read it aloud:

"Do not, as you value your life and honor, betray our secret!"

"I cannot explain now, but trust me in this, I implore you!"

ELEANOR.

Such was the letter, and hardly had the student read it the last time when there came a hurried step outside, then a loud rap.

"Come in!"

At the request a young man entered the room.

He was fine-looking, athletic in form, stylishly dressed, and yet upon his face there was a look of dissipation that was marked, and though under twenty-seven, he looked over thirty, as a fast life had left its traces upon him.

The occupant of the room started at beholding his visitor, and his face slightly paled.

He saw that the one who entered his room so unceremoniously looked angry, and the glance he bent upon him was one of hatred.

"This is an unexpected honor, to receive a visit from Mr. Gardner Graydon."

"May I ask why he has come?" and the student bowed with courtly grace, while he thrust the crumpled letter he held into his pocket by a quick movement.

"I am here, Harold Argyle, to say that either your life or mine ends this very day; yes, one of us must never leave this room alive," came the lowly uttered reply, and the voice quivered with passion as the speaker glared upon the man he threatened.

Harold Argyle did not show one atom of fear at these words, nor did his face even flush with anger.

A look of sadness, rather, came over his countenance, and he answered in deprecating tones:

"Graydon, I am sorry to see you come here to press the old quarrel of our families against me."

"Did either of us seek to renew the vendetta, I should be the one, for three years ago my father fell by your hands in a duel."

"Harold Argyle, the quarrel I have now with you is not of the past, for I grant that the life-debt is against you, and I have held myself ready to answer whenever you cared to demand a life for a life."

"Then why are you here, Mr. Graydon?"

"To demand that you meet me for the wrong you have done my sister," was the ringing response.

"Upon my honor, Graydon, you wrong me in the thought."

"What! do you deny that you know her?"

"I do not deny it."

"You have known her for nearly a year."

"I grant it."

"You won her love and—"

"Hold! I met your sister while traveling upon the Mississippi River. I did not know her, I sought not her acquaintance, but we were thrown together and it was in my power to serve her."

"When I found out who she was, I dared not tell her my full name, so gave her my Christian name of Harold Archer."

"More I cannot, will not tell you, Gardner Graydon, so it will be useless for you to ask it."

"I know more, I know all, and by Heaven, sir, you shall answer to me here for your acts."

"Why, that frame yonder holds the portrait of my sister, and you dare not deny it," and the angry man pointed to the frame over the mantle, with its gilt panels shutting out of sight the painting beneath.

"I admit nothing, I deny nothing," was the reply.

"I will reveal my words true, sir," and with a sudden spring the infuriated brother was alongside of the mantle, his hand upon the frame, as though to tear the gilded doors from their place.

But with the leap of a tiger Harold Argyle was by his side, and his voice was low and threatening as he said:

"Hands off, Gardner Graydon!"

"Do not drive me to an act I can but repent of."

The one he addressed turned upon him, his face livid, and said:

"Back! or by Heaven I will kill you where you stand!"

He turned again to the frame, but there was a grasp like iron upon his shoulder, a short

struggle, a smothered report of a pistol, a death-cry and a heavy fall.

Then all was still in the students' room.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEAD-SHOT DUELIST.

At a plantation home on the banks of the Mississippi River, a gay party were gathered upon the lawn.

The house was a large, rambling old structure, originally built by a French family over a century before, and its acres were numbered by the thousands.

Magnolia forests served as a background to the beautiful grounds that were literally covered with flowers, and orange groves and velvety lawns were upon every side.

The broad piazzas encircling the house invited to a cool shelter in the heat of the day, but in the afternoons, when the sun was near the horizon, the grounds were the resort of the dwellers at Orangelands, which was the name of the estate.

The party in question were some dozen in number, invited up from the city to welcome home from the convent, where she had been completing her education, the beautiful daughter of Planter Bernard.

Pierre Bernard was a man of great wealth, and his grandfather had come as a French exile to America and built the home of Orangelands upon the Mississippi.

A widower, with an only child, Anita, the planter made her his ideal, and her word was law to her father, though to her credit be it said she did not take advantage of the love he held for her, as many might have done in like position.

Anita had brought home with her from the convent a schoolmate, Eleanor Graydon, a beautiful girl whose home was in Virginia, and to meet her had invited a few friends from the city and the adjoining plantations.

Among the guests was a man of thirty-five, a friend of Planter Bernard, and a man with a face that though handsome was dark and stern, strangely so for one of his years.

He belonged to one of the old families in New Orleans, had been left a fortune, and lived luxuriously; but he was one who had already won a name as a duelist, a man to be dreaded.

Between the jovial planter and this man, Duncan Chatard, there existed a strong friendship which no one could understand, and it was hinted by many that the duelist would some day make Anita Bernard his wife.

Eleanor Graydon, the guest of Anita, was a girl of rare loveliness, and Duncan Chatard seemed to be at once drawn toward her, for he kept constantly by her side during the day.

When the sun was near its setting the party adjourned to the lawn, and Planter Bernard said:

"Chatard, I'll get my pistols, so that you can show our friends a specimen of your wonderful marksmanship."

"Yes, do," cried Anita, and all the rest joined in the request.

To Eleanor Graydon only was the duelist not known by reputation, for, not knowing that her father had invited him to be one of the party, Anita had not told her friend that they were to be honored by the presence of one who had already the lives of half a dozen human beings on his hands.

The pistols were gotten and a target set up.

All the young ladies put up forfeits against the marksman's making certain shots, and Duncan Chatard was the loser, and had innumerable little wagers to pay, for somehow his well-known deadly aim was far below the average that day.

At last he took a card, the ace of hearts from his pocket, and handing it to Eleanor Graydon, said:

"Here is a gold-piece, Miss Graydon, and a pencil, so please draw a circle around this ace of hearts."

Eleanor took the pencil and gold-piece, placed the latter on the card and drew the circle.

"Now, what will you wager me that I do not put the number of shots that you are years old within this circle without touching the rim, for I will load my own pistols, as the planter does not seem to understand the right charges?"

"Anything, for it cannot be done!" was the quick reply of Eleanor Graydon.

"May I select what the wager will be?" asked Planter Bernard.

"Certainly."

"If I lose, I hold myself ready to grant any demand you may make of me."

"And if you win?"

"He shall take as his wager your hand, Eleanor," was the smiling remark of Pierre Bernard.

Eleanor's face flushed and she hesitated; but Planter Bernard remarked:

"You are safe, Eleanor, so make the wager."

"Yes, what fun! do so, Eleanor," urged Anita, and Eleanor Graydon responded:

"Very well, I accept, for it amounts to nothing after all, and I do not believe it possible for you to win."

Duncan Chatard bowed and said:

"Your age, please, Miss Graydon?"

"Eighteen."

The card was put upon a tree, the two pistols were loaded by the duelist himself, and the marksman took his stand.

Then he began to fire, and, as rapidly as he could load, he kept it up until the eighteen shots had been sent into the card.

"I think you have lost, Miss Graydon," said Duncan Chatard with a smile, and he handed her the card.

The eighteen bullets had entered the circle, and the rim had not been touched by one of them.

Eleanor laughed, and Duncan Chatard remarked pleasantly:

"I shall hold you to your promise, Miss Graydon. Come, Mr. Bernard, tie the knot, please."

All laughed and entered into the spirit of the affair and stepping forward, Mr. Bernard called the two to stand before him and recited the marriage ceremony.

It was all done for a joke, merely a mock marriage, but no one suspected what the end would be.

CHAPTER III.

THE UNKNOWN RESCUER.

THE visit of Eleanor Graydon to Orangelands came to an end, and she started for her home in Virginia.

Her stay had been a delightful one, for Anita Bernard had done all in her power for the enjoyment of her schoolmate, and in this her father had most heartily joined.

Since the day of Duncan Chatard's dead-shot shooting, the marriage had seldom been referred to; but the duelist had been a frequent visitor at Orangelands and seemed to have taken a great fancy to his mock-bride.

Whether Eleanor was or was not deeply interested in him no one could tell; but the attentions of the handsome man to her no one could doubt, for certainly he was interested in her to a degree he had never been known to show to any one else.

At last the day came for Eleanor's departure, and she took the steamer at the landing of the plantation, and with tears in her eyes the two friends parted.

Duncan Chatard had promised to come up the river on the steamer to say good-by; but for some reason he did not appear, and the fair traveler was placed under the care of the captain by Pierre Bernard, and he was to find some one in whose charge to leave her when they reached the end of his run.

That afternoon as Eleanor sat on deck watching the gorgeous sunset, her eyes suddenly fell upon a young man who stood near.

He was smoking, and stood in a graceful pose, while his eyes were bent upon the sunset, the glow of which was upon his face.

As he was seemingly unconscious of her presence Eleanor glanced at him with real interest in her look.

Never before had she seen a face so attractive to her, and the splendid form was worthy of the manly, handsome face.

He was well-dressed, certainly was a gentleman, and looked to be one in whom man, woman or child could safely trust.

Suddenly, as though feeling her earnest gaze, he turned and their eyes met.

Eleanor's face flushed. She had been caught gazing with almost a stare, upon one whom she did not know.

The slightest perceptible smile hovered about his lips as he walked away, but otherwise he did not show that he was aware of her presence.

But he was, for he had before noticed the beautiful girl, and had seen her come on board the steamer at Orangelands.

If Eleanor Graydon had been struck by his appearance, so he had by hers, and he wondered who she was and had mused to himself:

"It is just such a face as that that I could love."

The sun disappeared behind mountains of clouds, and twilight came; but still Eleanor remained on deck.

Then the captain came to take her to supper, and afterward brought her upon deck again, with a wrap about her, for the night was cool.

Not far from her, pacing to and fro, and enjoying his cigar, was the young man whose face she had so admired.

He showed no sign to prove his consciousness of her presence, and yet they both seemed to feel that the other knew of each other's presence.

Some strange bond seemed to connect them, and yet what that bond was neither knew.

It was late when Eleanor retired to her state-room, and the cabins were deserted; but she left the young man still pacing the deck.

She had been but a short while in her state-room, when suddenly there was a shock, as though the steamer had struck the shore head on under full steam.

But a deafening report, crashing timbers and wild shrieks came a moment after.

Eleanor had just taken down her wealth of auburn hair, to retire, when she found herself thrown with severe force into one corner of her state-room.

She staggered to her feet in alarm, for the wildest cries resounded through the boat, which was swaying wildly, and the loud voices of men in agony and dread of death were heard.

Then came a knock at the door, and as she threw it open she beheld the unknown gentleman there.

He was perfectly calm, and said, as coolly as though he had come to ask her to promenade the deck:

"There has been a serious accident, miss, and I came to offer my services to you, for we must leave the boat."

There was no need to ask what the matter was, for the cries told Eleanor Graydon that the boiler had burst and the boat was on fire.

Forward all was wreck, death and confusion, and the cries of the wounded were piteous to hear.

And at that moment the boat rocked, plunged, and went down.

Then the stranger grasped Eleanor in his arms, bounded to the guards, and sprung into the river with her.

He was a bold swimmer, and in spite of the swirl of waters and the fierce current, he reached the shore, which was but a short distance away.

"I'll leave you here, miss, for there are others to save," he said, and he threw off his coat, hat, and shoes, to plunge once more into the river.

She sat like one dazed upon the bank, but she saw and heard all.

She saw that the boat had sunk to her upper guards, but the fire yet raged fiercely upon her deck.

Some had gone down to a death beneath the waters, others were springing into the river to escape the fire, and those wounded by the explosion were, with those unhurt, shrieking appeals for help.

Men did deeds of heroism that night which won them life-long fame, and bravest of the brave, Eleanor Graydon saw her unknown preserver, risking life to save others.

She beheld the burning boat, the struggling, fighting people, the bold acts of rescuers, and saw women, children and wounded men brought to the shore and left there.

She did all she could to help those less fortunate than herself, but through all her eyes followed the unknown.

Others saw him, too, and he was called a hero of heroes.

Other boats came in sight, ascending the river, and they landed and gave shelter and aid to those who suffered, while the wrecked steamer burned on.

At last the flames died out for want of material, or were squelched by the water, and the two steamers started on up the river with their loads of unfortunates.

To one of the steamers Eleanor had been taken by her preserver, and a state-room gotten for her.

Then, to her surprise, he had brought her sachel, and told her that her trunks, which with others had been on the upper deck, had been saved.

In such a time he had thought of her baggage, when it had never entered her mind, though all her jewelry and handsome wardrobe was in her trunks.

Then he had left her, and the next day she found that he was not upon the steamer that she had taken.

Three days after she took the train at Memphis for her home, and she started with glad surprise as she saw seated next to her the gallant unknown.

He did not look so well as when she had first beheld him, and his face had a haggard appearance.

He had sacrificed his baggage to aid others, to save what he had on that awful night of wreck and death, while his appearance indicated that he had taxed himself then beyond his strength.

He did not see Eleanor until she had placed her hand out and said:

"Will you not let me thank you now, sir, for all you have done for me, and, as we seem to be fellow-travelers, I will place myself under your protection if you will be further bothered with me."

She was almost startled by the effect of her words upon him.

He had turned suddenly very pale, and rose quickly, seemingly deeply moved from some reason unknown to her.

Then he bowed and replied:

"You owe me no thanks, Miss Graydon, for I simply did my duty to one I saw in sad need of aid."

"You know me, sir?" she said in surprise.

"Yes, as Miss Eleanor Graydon of Virginia," he said with a sad smile.

"Then let Miss Eleanor Graydon of Virginia say to you, sir, that she appreciates all that you did to save her from an awful death, and your own consciousness of what you did do for me, and for many others, must be your reward."

The tears were in her beautiful eyes now, and she grasped his hand.

He was silent, and she continued:

"Am I not to know the name of my rescuer, now wholly unknown to me?"

His face flushed and with some hesitation he replied:

"My name is—is—Harold Archer, Miss Graydon."

"It is a name I will never forget, sir."

"Let us be friends, Mr. Harold Archer."

Her manner was not bold, it was simply irresistible, and he took the little hand she outstretched to him.

But as he did so he sighed.

The name of Eleanor Graydon was not unknown to him; there was something connected with it that brought a cloud upon his face, and as he gazed upon the beautiful girl by his side the shadow fell upon his heart also.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BROTHER'S VOW.

"WITH my last breath of life I proclaim that man, Harold Argyle, my murderer!"

The words were firmly spoken, not as though issuing from lips already with the seal of death upon them.

The speaker was Gardner Graydon, the scene in the rooms of Harold Argyle, and the dying man lay upon the floor, supported in the arms of one of the professors of the university who had gone to the student's chamber alarmed by the shot and fall.

Others had rushed thither too, and they found Gardner Graydon dying, his head resting upon a bearskin rug, his hand pressed over his heart.

There had stood Harold Argyle, like one dazed, a pistol, just fired, in his hand, and his eyes bent upon the man at his feet.

In answer to the question what it all meant, Gardner Graydon had uttered the words that open this chapter, while Harold Argyle had stood like one in a dream.

But at the accusation against him he started, his face became livid and he seemed as though he would fall.

But rallying quickly he threw himself down on one knee by the side of the man who accused him, and cried in a voice that was full of earnest pleading:

"Graydon, for the love of God, do not make this charge against me!"

"I repeat it—Howard Argyle is my murderer!"

These were the last words uttered by Gardner Graydon; and a village officer, who had been hastily called to the scene, heard them and took them down.

"Mr. Argyle, I arrest you, sir," said the officer.

"Dick Roach, I am not guilty," was the reply.

"That you will have to prove at the trial, Mr. Argyle; but with his dying breath that gentleman accused you of murder, and you will hang for it, I'm thinking."

The words were scarcely uttered, when the officer was felled by a blow dealt squarely in the face, and Howard Argyle sprung over him, seized his hat and cane, and strode from the room.

"Stop him!"

The teacher gave the order, and two students sought to obey.

They regretted that they did so, for one measured his length upon the floor of the corridor, and the other was dashed against the wall with a force that stunned him, while the desperate man bounded down the steps, sprung upon the back of a horse that, saddled and bridled, was hitched near awaiting his master, and a moment after was flying along like the wind, a fugitive from justice.

Night came, and still the horseman rode at the same mad gait, and he had distanced all pursuit.

Suddenly he halted, and said:

"Fool! why do I fly?"

"I will return and give myself up, for they have no proof that I killed him."

He turned off the highway into a woodland path, and an hour after rode quietly up to the village jail.

"I wish to surrender myself, sir."

"I am Harold Argyle, accused of killing Mr. Gardner Graydon in my rooms at the university this afternoon, where I am a law student."

The jailer looked surprised.

He knew that half the country was then being scoured for the man who calmly came and gave himself up.

He had heard of the officer and the two students having gone down before the fugitive, and he cared not to sample the weight of his fist.

So he said:

"A very unfortunate affair, sir, very indeed; but it's to your credit that you surrender yourself, and I'll do my best to make you as comfortable as I can."

"I was a fool to fly; but under the impulse of the accusation did so; but I am not guilty, as can be proven," and with this Harold Argyle entered the jail and was at once placed in a cell, while the news spread that the student murderer had been captured.

The next day the body of Gardner Graydon was taken to his home in Virginia, and laid by the side of the ashes of several generations before him.

He and a younger brother had been the last of his race, and it was a custom among the Graydons, if one of their blood died by violence, for the next nearest of kin to kneel at the grave and vow to avenge the dead.

And there, among the cedars, did Gaston Graydon, the brother of the dead man, register a vow to Heaven, that if Harold Argyle escaped the gallows for his crime, he should die by his hand, if he had to track him to the uttermost parts of the earth to find and kill him.

CHAPTER V.

GUILTY.

NEVER, in the history of the community, where the university was located, had there been such an excitement as was occasioned by the death of Gardner Graydon at the hand of Harold Argyle the law student, as it was charged against him.

The young Virginian had graduated with the first honors of his class three years before, and then, after wandering about the world for awhile, had returned to study law.

His family was among the proudest in the State, and his grandfather, whose heir he was, rumor said, was a man of vast wealth, and people wondered why Harold Argyle sought a profession at all, as he was an only heir to a vast estate.

But he had decided, for some reason, to study law, and his studies were about ended when he was visited in his pleasant rooms by Gardner Graydon, with the fatal result already known.

Into a cell of the county jail he went, and a distinguished lawyer became his defender.

From Virginia came an appealing letter from his grandfather to the attorney:

"Save my boy's life, if you swamp the fortune of the Argyles to do so."

A thousand rumors were going about, as to the motives of Gardner Graydon in visiting the son of the man he had slain, and people wondered what the defense would be.

Harold Argyle had said that he was not guilty; that Graydon had killed himself, and of course the case promised to be one of the greatest interest.

Having delivered himself up, Harold Argyle accepted the situation without a murmur, and saw no one except his jailer and his lawyer.

He appeared to be perfectly cool, in spite of the awful situation he found himself in, and yet there was hardly one but who believed him guilty, and who felt sure that he would hang for his crime.

At last the day of trial came, and the prisoner entered the court-room with perfect coolness, and, excepting that he was very pale, seemed to be the least concerned of all present.

He eyed the counsel against him, glanced at the kindred and friends of the man he was accused of murdering, and then awaited the opening of the case.

There were no witnesses, other than the accused, and his story was awaited with the greatest anxiety and interest.

He told it in a voice that all heard, and which had not a quiver in it.

The dead man had entered his room, and had made certain charges against him, and those charges he refused to make known.

Then the visitor had attempted to uncover a picture in his room, he, the prisoner had resisted, there was a struggle, a pistol-shot, and Gardner Graydon had fallen to the floor in a dying condition, a pistol he had attempted to draw having gone off and killed him, instead of the one he had sought to use it upon.

"And that picture?" he was asked.

"I decline to say what it was."

The picture was ordered sent for, by the court, but the prisoner said:

"There is no need of sending for it, your Honor."

"Why?"

"I have had it removed."

"Where is it?"

"I decline to say."

"When was it removed?"

"The day after the tragedy."

"By whom?"

"I decline to state."

"You can be punished for contempt of court, shouted the counsel for the other side."

The prisoner smiled and responded:

"A man under the shadows of the gallows has no fear of other punishment."

In vain the entreaties, the threats and the badgering of the lawyers, the prisoner remained firm and would not tell anything about the picture.

He was firm, and the case had to continue as best it could to condemn him to death without a further knowledge of facts than the prisoner had given.

The prosecution made out a case that Graydon had gone to visit the rooms of Harold Argyle upon a matter of business unknown to all except the prisoner, and that he had been shot to death by the prisoner, and his dying confession had been to that effect.

So the case was left in the hands of the jury.

The defense proved that there had been a vendetta between the Graydon and Argyle families for generations.

It had begun far back in the early history of the State, when a Graydon had been an unsuccessful rival of an Argyle, and had slain him in a duel.

There had followed the death of a Graydon, long years after, at the hands of one of the sons of the slain man, and so it had gone on until Gardner Graydon had killed in a duel, several years before, the father of the prisoner.

"With the life of the prisoner's father upon his hands, what right had Gardner Graydon to go to visit Harold Argyle?" the lawyer for the defense had asked.

But in spite of there having been no witnesses, in spite of the fact that the powder-burned clothing of Gardner Graydon pointing to the fact that the prisoner's story that he had shot himself, might have been so, the jury decided upon the guilt of Harold Argyle.

The dead man's confession that Harold Argyle was his murderer, weighed against all else, and the jury returned the verdict, when asked the momentous question:

"Guilty or not guilty?" that the prisoner was:

"Guilty of murder in the first degree!"

Harold Argyle's face was the cynosure of all eyes at this verdict.

Not a muscle of his face moved, nor did the splendid form show a tremor.

He received it in silence, with a slight inclination of the head only.

When asked what he had to say, he replied:

"Those men, the jury, doubtless believe their verdict a just one; but in sending me to the gallows they are guilty themselves of murder, for I am innocent of the charge against me."

The sentence was passed in ominous silence, and the prisoner was led back to his cell, there to remain until the day of his execution upon the gallows for the murder of Gardner Graydon.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATHER'S SIN.

PIERRE BERNARD'S love for his only child, Anita, amounted almost to idolatry, and he would make any sacrifice for her sake.

But the Louisiana planter had one great fault, and that was his passion for gambling.

In this he had no seeming control over himself, and at times, when in the city of New Orleans, had been known to sit for several days and nights at the gaming-table, having his meals brought to him there.

And the planter had been a most successful card-player for years, and added large sums to his wealth.

Of course he was not one to go to gaming-houses and play with professionals, but he loved what he called a "quiet game," with a party of friends.

It was in one of these quiet games that he met the duelist, Duncan Chatard.

They played together, and the planter at first won largely.

He liked the young man immensely, found him worthy of his steel in a game of cards, and invited him to his home.

There they hunted, gambled, lived luxuriously and enjoyed life to its full extent.

The planter, at times, found that the duelist won from him.

It was seldom, it was true; but it occurred always when there was a very large stake up, and counting his many winnings against Chatard's few, Pierre Bernard discovered to his amazement that the duelist was far ahead of him in money.

So it went on, until Pierre Bernard had drawn his money out of bank and given notes covered by half of his wealth in slaves and land.

Anita's property, left by her mother, was intact, but his own, which he had hoped to leave her was under mortgage to Duncan Chatard.

When spending her two last vacations at home Anita had met Duncan Chatard.

He had been at first regarded as a friend of her father, and she had greatly liked him.

He had treated her with such marked respect, his manners were so courtly, and he had seen so much of the world that he was ever entertaining.

The dark side of his life she stood a little in awe of, and she had heard a story of how he had once loved desperately, and the one he loved had returned his affection, but her father had refused to allow his daughter to marry him, and thus the duelist had been made to suffer.

Thus matters stood when Anita Bernard came home from school, bringing with her Eleanor Graydon as a guest.

And up to Orangelands as a guest had gone Duncan Chatard.

For the first time since knowing him, Pierre Bernard had not been glad to welcome his guest.

The truth was Duncan Chatard had been steadily winning the fortune of the planter, and the latter had ever been in hopes, by one large game, or a run of good fortune, of getting back his losses.

But instead he had signed away his plantation and slaves to Duncan Chatard, and at their last meeting the duelist had quietly offered to put up all against Anita's hand.

Now, the planter liked Chatard; but he did not deem him the man to make his daughter

happy, and he wished to prevent a union between the two.

He half-feared that Anita loved the man, and yet he hoped that it was not so.

True, did fortune favor him, he might win back all, and thus give Duncan Chatard no hold upon his daughter.

But, should he lose, then the duelist would claim Anita's hand, and restore the claims he held against the planter's property.

For this reason Pierre Bernard was not glad to see the duelist at Orangelands.

Then he noted how much he seemed pleased with Eleanor Graydon, and he gave a hint that the beautiful Virginian was an heiress to vast wealth.

That she was wondrously beautiful and very fascinating, the duelist could see for himself.

At last he called to the planter to walk aside with him and said:

"You say that Miss Graydon is a woman of vast wealth?"

"Anita told me that she would be the richest girl in Virginia when her father died."

"She is a very lovely girl, certainly, and if I fail in my game with you, to win the hand of Miss Anita, I will try and capture the Virginia beauty."

The planter muttered something to himself about a hope that he would fail, and soon after the two sat down to their usual enjoyment of a game of cards.

As no "stakes" were before them, only an understanding what they would be, not even the servants had an idea that their master was gambling, risking a fortune on the turn of a card, and as the duelist always remembered them most generously, they were always glad to welcome him to Orangelands.

"You know the stakes to-day, Monsieur Bernard?" said Duncan Chatard, as the two took seats together at the table on the piazza, while the young guests were enjoying themselves in other ways.

"Yes, I know," was the low reply.

"The hand of your daughter against those notes of yours I hold?"

"I understand; but you must give her time, and me, if you win, for this shall not be a sudden affair."

"I will give you all the time you wish," was the reply, and the games were begun, for there were to be five, the winner of there being the victor.

The first game was won by the planter, and the second by the duelist.

Then Anita came out of the parlors and looked on an instant, while her father won again, and little did she dream what the stakes were.

Returning to her guests, she heard, as she walked away, her father say:

"We are even, now."

"Yes, the next game decides," Duncan Chatard had responded.

Had she known all that depended upon that game, she would never have been so lighthearted, for, though she liked Duncan Chatard, she dreaded him and certainly did not love him.

The last game was played slowly, and as he threw down his last card the planter turned pale, as though he had just lost a fortune, instead of won back that which he had lost.

He had won back the notes he had given, covering the fortune he held; but he had gambled away the hand of his daughter.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUELIST'S LOVE.

"I HAVE won," said Duncan Chatard, pleasantly, as he threw himself back in his chair.

"Yes," was the disconsolate reply of the planter.

"You do not seem very happy in winning back your plantation and slaves, for you know I give you back your notes in return for your daughter's hand?"

"True, and that is what saddens me."

"My winning?"

"Yes, for, frankly, Chatard, I do not believe you are just the man to make Anita happy."

"I am not a saint."

"I know that, but I am a sinner myself, so can understand your wild life; but then my child does not love you."

"I must win her love as I have her hand from you."

"I do not think you can."

"I can try."

"If you fail?"

"Then we will have to let her do what half the world does."

"What is that?"

"Marry a man she does not love."

"I loved my wife, Chatard."

"Yes, and she loved you; but that was a romantic exception."

"I am not hideous, in face or form, I am educated, come of good blood, have enough to live on, and so she might do worse."

"But, pardon me, my friend, you have a record that awes Anita."

"You mean as a duelist?"

"Yes."

"What would you have a man do when quarrels are forced upon him?"

"Oh, I do not blame you; but then Anita has

been brought up among a people who have taught her that dueling was a crime."

"And she fears me?"

"She says that she feels for you."

"Pity begets love."

"It will not in this case, and Miss Graydon seems to feel the same way, for she fairly turned pale when I told her that you had killed men in duels, and began by taking the life of one between whose family and yours there had been a vendetta for years."

"Yet she has treated me with marked kindness."

"I noticed it, and really think Miss Graydon likes you very much."

"In spite of my red-handed record?" said Duncan Chatard with a sneer.

"She also feels for the weight you carry in your heart, Chatard, as does Anita."

"Yet it does not seem to make me wretched to feel that I have dug graves and filled them," responded Duncan Chatard with a light laugh.

But there was no laughter in the eyes, no smile upon the lips, for the voice alone laughed.

The planter made no reply, and the duelist continued:

"Well, I will return you your notes, Monsieur Bernard, the day your daughter pledges herself to become my wife, and until then we will not play another game of cards."

"But, Chatard, a thought occurs to me," suddenly and eagerly said the planter.

"Yes?"

"I have heard that you were already in love."

The duelist frowned, and for a moment was silent.

Then he asked:

"Who is the lady I love, my friend?"

"That I do not know."

"She is a most beautiful girl, and one to make a Benedict of any man; but do you know that there is a barrier between the lady and my self?"

"I do not."

"You are aware, I believe, that there has been a vendetta between my family and one other?"

"Yes, but more than that it was a Mississippi family living upon the shores of the Bay St. Louis, I know nothing."

"The name is Sheldon, and they do live upon the Bay of St. Louis."

"There are a father, son and daughter, and I met the latter and loved her."

"It was her eldest brother whom I killed, when she was but a little girl."

"Her father killed my father, and my first duel was fought to keep up the vendetta which had gone on for generations between the Sheldons and Chatards."

"I challenged her father the day I was eighteen."

"He refused to fight a boy, so I waited until I was twenty-one, and again challenged him."

"He accepted, his son accompanying him to the field."

"On the way his horses took fright, ran away, and he was badly injured, his arm being broken and his coachman killed."

"But the son was unburt, and came on to the field to take his father's place, the latter acting as second as he was unable to fight."

"Well, the plucky fellow gave me this scar on my temple, and I sent a bullet into him that ended his life."

"I have heard that the father and remaining son yet intend to kill me, but they have made no attempt thus far."

"In confidence I will tell you that I met the daughter on shipboard, returning from France with her aunt, for she had been abroad for several years."

"She did not know me, and I loved her at sight, so let myself be known as Mr. Duncan."

"As such she became interested in me, and when the ship entered the Mississippi, I told her the truth, told her how dear she was to me, and asked her to be my wife."

"Then she said that she hated me; told me that my hand was stained with her brother's blood, and thus we parted; but I have never ceased to love her, Planter Bernard."

"And yet would marry my child?"

"Ah, my good friend, we all have our little romances in life, and that is mine, loving the daughter of a Sheldon."

"And you love her, though she hates you?"

"I am not so sure that she does hate me."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, when I fought my duel with Dabney Ross, I saw a lady on horseback in the distance."

"She had a glass to her eye, was half-hidden in a thicket, and watched the duel."

"When Ross fell dead she waited a few moments, and then rode away."

"Now, twice since in my duels, this has occurred, the appearance of a mysterious, veiled woman upon the scene, and so at last I determined to detect who it was."

"I put a detective on the track, and he followed her."

"She went to a certain stable, and from thence took a carriage, after leaving her horse."

"She was Miss Irene Sheldon, so if she does not love me, why should she always be near to watch the result of my duels?"

"I cannot understand it; but how does she know about these affairs?"

"That mystifies me."

"Well, it would prove to me that she loves you, and, as you love her my advice to you is to see her again, and, if she will marry you make her your wife and you will be happy."

"If she refuses?"

"Then I will give you the hand of my child, as you have won it."

"I'll do it," said the duelist firmly.

"Now come, let us join my young guests on the lawn," and the planter led the way to where Anita, Eleanor Graydon and the others had congregated, as the sun was near its setting, and the afternoon a delightful one out of doors.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE FATE.

A PRETTY yacht was sailing along the shores of the Mississippi Sound, and rounding in as though to head up toward the upper end of the Bay St. Louis.

Along the shores of the bay there were seen the houses of rich planters, with long piers running out to deep water where lay at anchor pretty pleasure crafts.

One of these houses, situated in a grove of live-oaks, stood out in bold relief from the beauty of the villa and its surroundings.

It was evidently the abode of a man of wealth, the home of luxury and refinement.

Toward this place the glass of one on the yacht was directed, and was scanning it closely.

"There is the Sheldon home, senior," had said the man at the yacht's tiller, a dark-faced Spaniard, addressing a person who reclined at ease on the deck.

"Ah!" and with this exclamation the one addressed had risen and turned his glass upon the villa.

There were but three men on the yacht, two sailors and the one who appeared to be the owner.

As he swept the shore with his glass he started and said:

"Pedro, run the yacht in nearer shore, drop anchor and lower the boat."

The order was obeyed, and the boat was soon going shoreward with one occupant in it.

That one was the master of the yacht.

He was pulling toward a point of land which was heavily wooded with magnolias, and about half a mile distant from the villa before spoken of.

Landing upon the sandy beach, the boatman walked rapidly toward the magnolias.

He soon came to where a horse was hitched to a swinging limb, and upon his back was a ladies' saddle.

Further on was a slight rise, and the top of it was walled in.

The space was small, and a glance told that it was the family burying-ground of some coast planter.

The iron gate was open, and approaching it the man glanced within.

There he beheld a dozen tombs, and standing by one marked by a marble cross, was a young girl.

She wore a riding-babit that fitted her superb form to perfection, and her hat, falling back upon her shoulders and held by a ribbon alone, displayed a haughty head and a face of exquisite beauty.

It was a face of Madonna-like loveliness, gentle as a dove were the eyes in expression, and the lips seemed never to have had an angry word pass them.

Tears were in the eyes as she stood there, and her whole appearance indicated grief.

Upon the marble cross was engraven:

"BENNETT SHELTON,

Slain by the hand of

DUNCAN CHATARD,

O tober 1st, 18—.

The fourth victim of the Chatard Sheldon Vendetta.

He who sheds the blood of man,
By man shall his blood be shed."

It was a strange inscription for a tombstone, and near it were the three other victims of the Sheldon name, who had fallen in the fatal *duello* between two families, brought on in the long ago by rivalry in love, the cause of many a lost life and heartache.

The man beyond the iron gate stood regarding the maiden with deepest interest.

His gaze was one that seemed unfathomable.

He seemed to know who it was that rested there at her feet, even did he not read the strange inscription upon the marble cross.

"Oh, Heaven! can I never free myself from this fatal love?"

"Am I doomed, in spite of my prayers, in spite of my coming here daily to view these graves, to love one whose destiny it is to kill his human kind?"

"God have mercy upon me, for the burden I bear is heavy indeed!"

The words fell aloud from the lips of the maiden, her head was bowed, her hands clasped tightly upon her riding-whip, and she stood the

very picture of woe, while the man, "whose destiny it was to kill," stood gazing upon her from the gate of the little burying-ground.

"Unite your fate with mine, Irene Sheldon, and in spite of the graves between us, joy will be ours," and the duelist stepped forward and confronted the girl as she stood by her brother's grave.

A cry came from the lips of Irene Sheldon, and she started back, as her eyes fell upon the man who had so suddenly appeared before her.

There he stood, with erect form, but uncovered head, the man who had slain the one in the grave at her feet.

Tall, handsome, with his stern face softened by a look of pleading now, stood Duncan Chatard the Duelist.

She had shrunk back as though a serpent had glided across her path, so sudden, so unexpected had been his coming before her.

And yet her very words, uttered all unconscious of his presence had told that she loved him, loved this man between whose blood and hers a cruel vendetta had long existed, loved him who had slain her brother.

She had seen him on the ship and knew not that a barrier was between them.

She had, without this knowledge, loved him.

The voyage had been a long one, and she felt that she was beloved.

Knowing him only by the name of Duncan, won by his courtly address, his brilliant powers of conversation, his fascination of manner and voice, she had given him her love, and felt that he loved her.

Then the dread secret had come out, as to who he really was, and she had driven him from her, telling him in her angry passion that she hated him.

Still, though they thus parted, she could not forget him, and she had recently employed a spy to watch his career, and, drawn by a fascination which she could not resist, she had witnessed several of his duels, praying to Heaven to spare his life.

Now they met again, she with a confession of her love upon her lips, and he standing there with uncovered head, his form casting a shadow upon the grave of the man he had killed.

Was this fate?

CHAPTER IX.

A REFUSAL AND AN ACCEPTANCE.

"UNITE my life with yours, Duncan Chatard, my life with yours?"

Irene Sheldon fairly hissed the words from between her shut teeth.

He had waited too long after speaking.

The man had not followed up his bold surprise quick enough, and had given her time to think, to command herself.

Had he sprung forward, grasped her hand, dropped on his knees before her, pleading for mercy, then Irene Sheldon might have been won then and there.

She knew that he had heard her words.

She was well aware that he understood them.

Appalled by his boldness, she was at first incapable of speech or action, and she might have forgotten the past and hoped for the future.

But she had time, as he stood there, silently pleading before her, to remember, to recall that between them was a great gulf fixed, and that her dead brother had fallen by the hand of the man who came there to meet her.

So it was, when she had commanded herself, stilled her throbbing, aching heart, and steeled herself to hatred rather than love, that she hissed forth the words that open this chapter.

He started as though they stung him to the quick, and bent his head low.

But he spoke not.

"Speak, sir, did you ask me to unite my life with yours?"

Her voice rung as it gave a command, rather than made a request.

The Madonna-like look in her eyes had gone, and the gentle expression upon her lips had given place to resolution and anger.

"I so asked you, Irene."

He spoke in a voice of tenderness that would have touched a heart of stone, some would think.

"You have dared to ask me to forget the past, the red, deadly, horrid past, and unite my life with yours?"

"I have, for I have more to forget and forgive than you, Irene."

"More?"

"Yes, for one of your name began this bitter feud, and your father placed my father in his grave."

"And who lies in this grave, Duncan Chatard?" and she pointed to the grave at her feet.

"Your brother."

"Yes, and whose hand placed him here?"

"My hand."

"You took his young life upon the threshold of manhood."

"I was but a little child then, but I recall his handsome face, his sunny smile, and how he loved me in the long ago."

"I remember the day they brought him home, a cruel scar upon his forehead, made by your bullet, and his lips silenced forever."

"I recall how I kissed him, and was awed by his white, cold face, scarred by your cruel bullet."

"I remember how I stood here and saw them lower him into this grave, to shut him out forever from my sight."

"I remember how those I love have taught me how to hate those who bear your name."

"And now you come here, dare come to this sacred spot and ask me to unite my life with yours!"

"It was told how I had met one on our voyage from France, who had won my heart, and people have said that I was heartbroken because my lover came not to me, because he had deserted me."

"I told not the fearful truth, for I knew that it would sacrifice other lives, as my father and my brother would seek you out to add another life to those taken."

"I have borne my secret and my sorrow in silence, and you, Duncan Chatard, have come here to ask me to unite your life and mine."

"No! a thousand times no! for the dead would rise up and haunt me."

"Go! go from me forever, and Heaven grant your path and mine cross no more in this life."

"Go, sir, leave this spot, sacred to the dead, and where your presence is a curse."

The man fairly writhed under her words.

Had he loved her less he might have pleaded, at least might have shown anger.

But, as it was, he did not plead, did not utter a word.

He simply turned upon her a look of pleading that went to her very soul.

Then, in a voice that quivered and was hoarse with emotion, he said:

"I obey your command, Irene."

Turning upon his heel, still with uncovered head, he passed out of the little burying-ground, walked slowly away through the magnolias and disappeared down the point.

She stood like a statue, as white, as cold as the marble cross against which now she leant for support, and watched his form until it disappeared.

He did not look back, and when he went out of her sight, she moaned like one in deepest pain, and dropping upon her knees, rested her head upon the marble cross and wept bitterly.

At last she arose, and she was perfectly calm.

Out of the little cemetery she went, reached her horse and mounting, rode away.

As she gained the highway, she saw a boat with a single occupant, just running up to the little yacht at anchor a quarter of a mile offshore.

She saw the yacht get under way and head back along the coast in the direction of New Orleans.

Then she rode homeward at a slow pace.

Her face had lost its expression of softness, and was hard now almost to cruelty.

Then it began to change and a look of intense sorrow came over the features, and at last settled into a look of resigned sadness.

She had passed through a fearful ordeal but she had come out victor over herself.

The temptation had been oh so great, to go where her love dictated, but duty to the dead, and to the living, had shown her what was the course for her to take.

She had banished the man she loved, put the seal of sorrow upon her life, and had decided to live for those who were bound to her by kindred ties.

As she rode up to the door of her handsome home, a servant came to take her horse, and her father advanced to lift her from her saddle.

"Why, my child, your ride has given you no color, as is usually the case."

"Do you feel well, or has aught happened to alarm you?" said Doctor Sheldon anxiously.

He was a splendid type of the Southern gentleman of the past, tall, erect and with a military carriage, for he had been a surgeon in the United States Army, and only left it after his marriage to Irene's mother.

He was a man of fifty, with a fearless face and one that was stamped as though with some memory of the past that was ever present in the thoughts.

"I do not feel well, father," was the reply of Irene, as she gathered her skirt about her and ascended the piazza steps.

"Well, come down after you have dressed, my child, for I have something to say to you."

Irene started, for she had a guilty conscience, and she feared that her father knew of her meeting in the graveyard with Duncan Chatard.

But his further words relieved her mind, as he continued:

"Captain Claude Scofield has been here to see us, and I wish to tell you why he came."

Irene made no reply, but went on to her room.

In half an hour she joined her father upon the piazza, and saw that he was gazing through his spy-glass at a distant craft.

"There is a strange yacht for these waters; some of the planters have doubtless bought a new craft; but I do not know who it can be."

"She stood out of the cove near the point," he said, his eye still upon the vessel, which Irene but too well knew who was the master of.

"Captain Scofield has been here, you said, father?" Irene remarked, anxious to change the conversation from the little yacht.

"Yes, and a splendid fellow he is, too; but then you know, my child, I have never gotten over my old affection for military men, and may be prejudiced in his favor.

"The truth is, Irene, he is home on leave, having been wounded in a late brush with the red-skins, and he came at once over to see us, for he said that he no longer wished to visit Gulf View under false pretenses, as he put it.

"When here, some six months ago, he said that he learned to love you, and so he now asked me for permission to win you if in his power, and made an offer of his hand.

"I accepted it, my child, of course subject to your feelings in the matter, for you know he is rising rapidly, has a generous income, and nothing can be said against him.

Irene was silent for a moment, and her eyes were cast down in deep thought.

She remembered Claude Scofield as a handsome cadet when she was but a little girl, and she had been half in love with him then.

Had she never have met Duncan Chatard, then Claude Scofield would have been the man she could have loved, yet never with the same intensity of passion that she could feel for the duelist, for he to her was the one love of her life.

Now she said in her quiet way:

"Father, I know of no man whom I respect more than I do Captain Scofield, and I feel honored by his regard."

"Irene, I am delighted to hear you say so, for this assures your future happiness in marrying such a man as I know Scofield to be."

And one month after, Irene Sheldon pledged herself to marry one man, though her heart told her she irrevocably loved another.

CHAPTER X. THE LIE DIRECT.

A PARTY of gentlemen were gathered in a fashionable hotel in New Orleans one evening, some six weeks after the meeting between Duncan Chatard and Irene Sheldon at the grave of the maiden's brother, when a young officer joined the group and was welcomed by words of greeting that proved his popularity.

"Ah, Chatard, you do not speak to Captain Scofield—do you not know him?" said one of those present, as he saw that Duncan Chatard and the young officer had not spoken.

"I have not that honor," was the reply of the duelist.

Then the introduction was made, and Duncan Chatard extended his hand with the remark:

"I am glad to meet Captain Scofield, of whom I have often heard."

"Pardon me, sir, but did I understand that you were Mr. Duncan Chatard?" the officer asked with marked politeness, and without grasping the outstretched hand of the duelist.

"Yes, sir, my name is Duncan Chatard."

The face of the officer flushed; but he said firmly:

"Mr. Chatard, pray do not misunderstand my words, for I say them with no disrespect; but, when I tell you that Miss Sheldon, of Bay St. Louis, is pledged to be my wife, you will understand why we cannot be even acquaintances."

All present then recalled the vendetta long existing between the Sheldons and the Chatards, and that Bennett Sheldon had fallen by the hand of Duncan Chatard.

As Captain Claude Scofield was to marry Irene Sheldon, of course he could not accept the hand of the man who had slain her brother.

An awkward silence followed, for such a *contretemps* no one had looked for.

But Duncan Chatard brought every eye upon him by his retort:

"Sir, I seek not your friendship, but our better acquaintance is assured if you are not a coward, for I say that you lie when you state that Miss Sheldon is to be your wife."

The man had no reason to doubt the words of the officer other than that he knew Irene Sheldon loved him, and he was yet, in his own mind, certain of winning her.

Quick as a flash the right hand of the soldier fell upon the face of the duelist, and he staggered under the blow.

But, recovering himself, he raised his hat politely and walked away.

"My God! what an unfortunate affair, Scofield: but we cannot blame you," said a young planter who was present.

"I could not take his hand, Valour, though I have heard of him as a fine fellow, excepting a too ready hand for dueling; but he will challenge me, of course," said Claude Scofield, coolly.

"Within the hour, you may be sure.

"I hope you are a good shot, for he is a dead one."

"I have saved my life before with my aim, Valour.

"But will you go out for me?"

"Of course; but let us go to your room," and

the two friends left the party and went up to the officers' room, for he was stopping at the hotel the few days he was spending in the city.

The crowd left behind felt deeply chagrined at what had happened.

A few blamed Captain Scofield for not taking the hand of the duelist and then letting the acquaintance end; but others upheld the soldier as being right, and condemned the duelist for his insult.

A rumor had been about that the officer and Irene Sheldon were engaged, and of course Claude Scofield could but do as he did, was the general verdict rendered about the affair.

The chances of life and death between the two men were coned over.

The well-known fatal affairs in which Duncan Chatard had been engaged caused many to look upon the soldier as doomed; but upon numerous occasions he had shown himself a man of indomitable pluck, and had saved his life in battle with his revolvers.

In the mean time Duncan Chatard had sought his home, a fine old residence in the upper part of the city, and dispatched a servant for a friend to come to him.

That friend was Pierre Bernard, who was down in the city on business connected with his plantation.

"Well, Chatard, I was just getting ready to come up and dine with you, as I promised, when your messenger arrived, and on my way I heard that which causes me to guess at the reason I am needed so promptly," said the planter.

"Yes, it is a duel, and with that handsome, gallant young Captain Scofield of whom you have heard."

"Too bad, too bad! for he is such a fine fellow from all accounts."

"You seem to predict his death," said the duelist, with a smile.

"Of course, for you are a fatal foe, Chatard; but you wish me to serve you?"

"Yes."

"It has been a long time since I have been mixed up in such affairs, but I cannot refuse you."

"Where is he?"

"At the San Luis."

"Who gave the insult?"

Chatard explained the situation.

"Why did you risk the row?"

"I did not."

"You gave him the lie?"

"True, for I happen to know that the lady loves a man in whom I am deeply interested."

"Ah! loving is one thing, and marrying another, but I will have time to go before dinner, so we can enjoy the meal, for I know what your table is from experience."

The carriage was called and Planter Bernard entered it and was driven to the San Luis.

He found himself admitted at once to the pleasant room in which sat Captain Scofield and his friend Valour.

The latter knew Pierre Bernard, was surprised to see that he was the second of the duelist but presented him to the soldier who received him most courteously, offering him a glass of wine and a cigar, which the planter accepted.

After a few minutes he said:

"I am sorry, very sorry, Captain Scofield, to come on an unpleasant errand, for I am the friend of Monsieur Chatard."

"Our fathers were friends, Mr. Bernard, and I am glad to meet you; but regret that the meeting is not under more pleasant circumstances."

"Monsieur Valour will act for me, if you please," and the captain walked away to the window, while the two seconds soon arranged matters for a meeting on the morrow at sunrise, on the old battle-ground below the city, the weapons to be swords, for, the soldier, as the challenged party, had insisted upon these, hoping to master his enemy and save his life, for he did not wish to have it upon his hands if it was in his power to prevent.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONFESSION.

THE sun was just setting, as a carriage rolled up to the massive gate of a handsome home in the outskirts of the Crescent City, on the day of the challenge of Duncan Chatard to Captain Scofield.

Out of the carriage stepped the young officer, and a servant at the gate said:

"Miss Irene in de hammock, sah," and he pointed to a distant part of the gardens surrounding the mansion.

The home was that of Irene Sheldon's aunt, whose heiress she was, and she had come down to spend a few days in the city to prepare for her marriage, which was to take place before the return of Captain Scofield to his regiment.

Irene never looked better, as she reclined in the hammock, a book upon her lap, but unopened, as though she had not been reading it.

She was dressed in pure white, and the glow of sunset was upon her face, and took from it the look of sadness that seemed of late to have settled there, never to be effaced.

She arose as she saw the approach of her

lover, and offering her hand, moved toward a rustic seat near by, while she said:

"I did not expect you until to-night, Claude, and who told you to surprise me here, sir?"

"A servant told me you were here, Irene, and I was glad to find you alone, for I am here to tell you of a most serious affair."

His face told her that something had occurred to disturb him, for he was not as cool as when in the presence of his foe.

"Pray tell me what it is, Claude?" she said, anxiously.

"Irene, let me tell you that I have loved you ever since you were a child.

"You were my girl sweetheart, and my every wish has been to win your love.

"At last I won your promise to be my wife, but yet, my dear little woman, I have felt in my heart that perhaps I was not your first, your only love.

"It has seemed to me, since my return, that you had some heart secret which you have kept from me.

"Pardon me, Irene, but to-day I met one whose name and your own, have been sadly connected in the past.

"I refer to Duncan Chatard, the duelist.

"I was introduced to him and he extended his hand; but, as our engagement is made public now, I could not but tell him we could not be friends, for you were my betrothed."

He saw that she uttered no word, that she was as white as marble, and as still.

"I confess to having rather liked the man, Irene, and hoped that he would understand my position; but instead, when I told him that you were my betrothed, his words were that he sought not my friendship, but, if I was not a coward, our better acquaintance was assured, for, if I said that you were pledged to become my wife, I uttered a lie."

She started at this, glanced up into his face and said:

"Did he say this to you?"

"He did for those were his words."

"He gave you the lie?"

"Yes, Irene?"

"And you?"

"I struck him, Irene, for what could I do?"

"Nothing other than you did."

"But what then, Claude?"

"He sent a friend to me, Mr. Pierre Bernard, a planter, and I referred him to Girard Valour, my second."

"Well?"

"A meeting was arranged for to-morrow, and I would not have spoken to you about it, Irene, had not Mr. Bernard told Valour that Chatard had felt, when he gave me the lie, that you loved one in whom he was deeply interested."

"This is what he said, Claude?"

"Yes."

"And this is why you have come to me?"

"It is, Irene, for I feel that you can explain it away."

She was silent for some minutes or more, and then asked:

"When does this duel take place?"

"At sunrise to-morrow."

"Where?"

"On the old battle-field."

"Mr Valour is to be your second?"

"Yes."

"Is he stopping with you?"

"Yes, and will remain at the San Luis to-night."

"Claude, you still trust me?"

"With my life, Irene; but you can explain."

"I can."

"And will?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what this man means by his insinuation?"

"I do."

He sighed, and she put her hand upon his and said:

"Claude, I do know Duncan Chatard.

"I crossed the ocean with him when I came over with auntie from France, for he was a passenger upon the same clipper ship.

"I saw him, was struck by his remarkable appearance and courtly manners, and knowing him only as Mr. Duncan, I learned to admire him.

"It was a long voyage, Claude, and I was thrown constantly with him.

"He sung well, sketched many little things for me in my album, read in a voice that was musical, and in the end, I admit it, Claude, won my love."

"He knew who you were?"

"Yes."

"And sought to win your love for revenge upon a woman of your name, as he had had it upon your brother?"

"No, for he loved me."

"I can well understand that he could do so, Irene."

"When we reached the river he came to me and told me the truth."

"This was manly in him at least."

"He told me that he had left off his last name to save me pain in knowing who he was.

"Then he had loved me, and so let himself drift on until the harm was done."

"I told him that we must never meet again."
"And have you?"
"Yes."
"When?"
"The day that you came to Gulf View and asked father for my hand, I was in our family burying-ground, praying, as I often did, that Duncan Chatard might be wholly obliterated from my life."

"There he suddenly appeared before me, having come over in a yacht, seen me there and landed."

"I said bitter things to him that day, Claude, and we parted, I hoped forever."

"Then I crushed my love for him and took you into my heart, Claude, and I had begun to feel that as your wife happiness would come to me."

"But, alas! your words bring upon me a fearful dread, and more, I fear now I will lose your love, as you now know the truth."

"No, no, Irene, you do not know me to say this, for I love you too much to condemn you, and I will win your whole heart yet, see if I do not."

"But to-morrow?"

She spoke in a whisper, and he understood her well.

"You refer to the duel?"

"Yes, Claude."

"I selected swords, for I have never met my match with that weapon, Irene, and I wish to disarm and give him his life."

"Ah, Claude, that man is as skilled in the use of a sword as he is deadly with a pistol."

"Don't get blue, Irene, but hope for the best; come, it is growing dark, so I will escort you to the house, and return this evening to visit you," and ten minutes after he had gone.

But a few moments after his departure a negro horseman rode away from the mansion, and he dashed along like the wind, carrying a note to a plantation several miles up the river, and it was addressed to:

"RUPERT SHELTON, ESQ."

"The Oaks Plantation."

CHAPTER XII.

IRENE'S PLOT.

RUPERT SHELTON was a fine specimen of the young Southerner.

He was very much like his father, and his manners were such as to win all toward him.

He had been a clever student, and coming home had relieved his father of the cares of the estate and proved to be a most excellent manager.

There were two events that had happened during the life of Rupert Sheldon which had left a deep impression upon him.

One was the duel of his father with the father of Duncan Chatard.

The boy had witnessed it, slipping off to the scene, and hiding in a thicket, had seen his father shoot his adversary through the heart.

Years after the duel between Bennett Sheldon and Duncan Chatard was fought, and Rupert, then a well grown youth, had also been a witness, having driven his brother to the scene.

The old negro nurse had afterward said that she heard him one night talking to himself after he had gone to bed, and what he had said fairly startled her, for he was registering a vow to one day avenge his brother.

But time went by and no other tragedy occurred, and people began to think that both Doctor Sheldon and Rupert were content to let the dead past bury its dead and not bring Duncan Chatard to account.

Then Rupert fell in love with a pretty girl, who had been a schoolmate of his sister, and whose father was a sugar-planter, dwelling above New Orleans on the Mississippi River.

And it was to this home, The Oaks, where Rupert Sheldon had gone, after escorting his sister to his aunt's, and thither the messenger went and handed him the note from Irene.

It simply said:

"Come to me with all haste. Do not delay a moment."
IRENE.

Bidding his lady-love good-night, Rupert Sheldon mounted his horse and rode to town.

Captain Scofield had not arrived when he reached his aunt's, and Irene met him at the door and led him to an inner room.

Then she made a second confession, and told him all that had happened, from her having met Duncan Chatard upon the clipper-ship to Captain Scofield's visit to her an hour before.

Rupert Sheldon listened in deepest silence, his brow clouded and his lips set.

When he had heard all, he said:

"I see why you have sent for me, Irene."

"You understand?"

"Yes, that I must take this duel off the hands of Claude Scofield?"

"Yes."

"It certainly is my duty to do so; but can it be done?"

"How do you mean?"

"Will Scofield yield?"

"He must."

"Saying so does not make him do so, sister."

"I will entreat, yes, command."

"Don't be a little goose, Irene, for Scofield is no fool."

"He is a man of the world, and though he has never fought a duel, he knows the code thoroughly."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Just this, that Chatard gave the lie to Scofield and got his face slapped for doing so."

"That put it upon Chatard to demand satisfaction, and he has done so, and a duel has been arranged."

"Now Chatard demands redress of Scofield, and will expect it, and there is but one way that I can appear upon the scene."

"And what way is that?"

"If Scofield is unable to get there, then I could appear to represent him."

"Brother Rupert, I do not fear for you, as I know that for years you have practiced daily with your pistols and swords, and your skill with both weapons is marvelous."

"I would not have you kill Duncan Chatard; but give him his life, and that would end the feud between his name and ours, for he could not, in honor, press it afterward."

"This I ask you to do for me, and I feel that you can."

"Promise me this and I will see that Claude Scofield does not reach the field to-morrow to fight this duel."

"I promise, Irene; so arrange it, and I will look up Monsieur Bernard at the proper time and tell him that Scofield was unable to come, so I take his place."

"It is just the chance I have lived for, Irene."

"But remember you are not to kill him."

"I remember, for I believe I would rather give him his life than take it, for it would crush him so to the death in humiliation."

"You are bitter, Rupert."

"I saw brother Bennett die by his hand, sister," was the reply, and he saw Irene wince under his words.

"I cannot see," he continued, "just how you are to keep Claude Scofield away, for I happen to know him well, and to put him in jail is about the only course that I can see."

"Leave that to me, Rupert, and now depart before Claude comes, for he may suspect something."

She held up her face for a kiss with no fear for the safety of the noble brother whose marvelous skill, strength and indomitable courage she so well knew.

She left all in his hands with the confidence that a child would place in its father, and kissing her red lips the handsome young fellow took his departure whistling as indifferently as though the shadow of death was not hovering over him.

Soon after he left, Captain Claude Scofield arrived.

He was stylishly dressed, never looked so handsome, and greeted Irene and her aunt, who had come into the parlor to meet him, with a manner that showed nothing of what must be in his thoughts.

Mrs. Girard remained for awhile with her niece and her lover, and then promising to join them at a late supper took her departure from the room.

In spite of Claude Scofield's saying that he was anxious to get some sleep, to steady his nerves, it was nearly midnight before supper was announced, and then Mrs. Girard joined them, and the meal lasted for over an hour.

At length the young soldier arose to take his leave, and bowing to Mrs. Girard he led Irene into the parlor for a last farewell, for he was not one to disregard the danger he must face in a few hours.

Irene detained him as long as she could, and then said:

"One glass of wine with you, Claude, before we part."

"Sit there and await me."

She left the room, but soon returned with two glasses and a decanter, and took a seat by his side upon the sofa.

She filled the glasses and said:

"To your full forgiveness of me, Claude."

"I have nothing to forgive you, Irene."

"Drink the toast for my sake."

He did so, and soon after rose.

But his head reeled, he tried to walk, but sunk back upon the sofa and was unconscious.

"He all right, honey, and won't wake up for hours."

"Mammy Lize told you she done know what she was about," said an old negress entering the room, and a moment after Mrs. Girard followed.

"Oh, how like death he looks," cried Irene.

"No, Lize knows what she is about, Irene, and he is simply drugged," replied Mrs. Girard, whom Irene had let into the secret; but she added, in a low tone:

"God protect poor Rupert."

Irene heard the words and started.

It was the first time she had had a thought that harm might befall her noble brother, who was to face a man whose touch was as deadly as death itself.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON HONOR'S FIELD.

MR. VALOUR awaited for his friend Scofield until after midnight, and then, entering an adjoining room, threw himself down to rest.

He left the door open so that he could hear his friend come in, and as he dozed off, muttered to himself:

"All wrong, all wrong in Scofield, for he will have no nerves after sitting up all night."

When Mr. Valour did awake, it was with a start.

The lamp was burning, but the daylight had dimmed it.

There was some one too in the room, and it was not Claude Scofield.

"Why, Sheldon, you here?"

"Where is Scofield, and what time is it?" he cried, recognizing the young planter, for they were friends.

"One question at a time, my dear Valour."

"Yes, I am here, as you see; it is five o'clock, and Captain Scofield is detained elsewhere, so I am to take his place in this affair, and we have but one hour and a half to get coffee and reach the field."

"Scofield detained?" cried Valour.

"Yes."

"Then I must meet Chatard in his stead."

"No, indeed, for I have arranged it all, and if I do not kill Chatard, then the captain can try his hand at another time."

"Come, we must be off."

"But where is Scofield?"

"Unavoidably detained, as I said, and more I cannot tell you."

"Come, we have no time to lose."

Girard Valour was but half satisfied.

He knew that Rupert Sheldon was only too anxious to meet Chatard; but he could not understand how the soldier had allowed him to take his place.

"Rupert, has any accident befallen Scofield?"

"Yes, something that prevents his coming, and I fight in his stead, and God knows I have reason for meeting Chatard."

"Don't let me be late, Valour, and I'll fight any man who doubts the courage of Claude Scofield."

"Very well, I will go with you, of course; but, as Scofield's second, I shall also offer to take his place."

"If Chatard prefers you, well and good."

"Come on!"

In a few moments more the two friends were driving swiftly along the river highway toward the old battle-field.

As they neared the place they saw a party on horseback ahead.

They recognized Chatard and Pierre Bernard riding side by side, and behind them a negro, who carried a long bundle across his saddle-born.

They reached the spot decided upon almost as soon as did the horsemen, and Valour and Sheldon sprung out of the carriage and raised their hats.

Duncan Chatard and his second acknowledged the salute, but they seemed surprised at not seeing the soldier, and Pierre Bernard asked:

"Where is your principal, Mr. Valour?"

"I am sorry to say that an accident prevents Captain Scofield's appearance upon the field; but Mr. Sheldon is here to act as his representative, while as his second, I also am very much at the service of Mr. Chatard, so he can take his choice between us."

Duncan Chatard bowed with courtly grace, and turning to his second said in his softest tones:

"Mr. Bernard, kindly say that between Mr. Valour and Mr. Sheldon there is no choice."

"With the one I have no quarrel, while on the other hand there has been a feud for generations between the Sheldons and the Chatards."

"If Mr. Sheldon is here to meet me, I am wholly at his service; but I do not consider that it in anyway squares my affair with Captain Scofield."

"You have heard, gentlemen, so I need not repeat the words of my friend," said Pierre Bernard.

"Yes, and I claim the right to meet Mr. Chatard," Rupert Sheldon rejoined.

"Then I must yield, and serve you, Rupert,"

whispered Valour, and he walked apart with Pierre Bernard, while the servants brought the boxes of weapons.

Duncan Chatard looked at the handsome young planter before him with a strange expression upon his dark, stern face.

He seemed to forget the reason of his coming there, in recalling a scene that had occurred with Bennett Sheldon.

The younger brother looked much as had Bennett Sheldon on the day of his fatal meeting with the duelist, and there was an expression in his face much resembling his sister.

Did the duelist think of this?

Did it awaken in his heart mercy for the young man?

A look of surprise crossed the face of the duelist, as he saw that swords were to be the weapons used, as had been arranged with Captain Scofield.

He knew that the young soldier was noted as a swordsman; but could not understand why Rupert Sheldon was willing to risk his life with a blade.

The preliminaries were soon arranged and the two men stood face to face.

The planter showed no concern at facing a man who had never known defeat, one who never showed mercy, one who had slain his brother, and had then dared offer his hand to Irene.

Duncan Chatard was always cool, and he was ever watchful, despising no foe.

The blades crossed, and Duncan Chatard felt that he had met a dangerous antagonist in the young planter, who pressed him from the first with a skill and strength which kept him at his best, and surprised Pierre Bernard and Valour, both of whom well understood the use of rapiers.

The fight soon developed into the same tactics practiced by each, for both men were watching for an opening to cripple the other's sword-arm.

It came first to Duncan Chatard, for the sharp point of his rapier ripped open the right arm of Rupert Sheldon from the wrist to the elbow.

As his blade fell to the ground, the wounded arm dropping to his side, Duncan Chatard picked it up and said:

"Accept your life, Mr. Sheldon, at my hands, and permit me to return the sword you wield so well."

Rupert Sheldon's face was livid, but he made no reply, simply bowing, while Valour sprang to his side, and quickly bound up the wounded arm, at the same time urging the coachman to drive with all haste to town.

In the mean time Duncan Chatard had called to his servant to bring up the horses, and mounting, he rode off with Planter Bernard toward the city.

CHAPTER XIV.

MERCILESS.

PIERRE BERNARD left the dueling field with real pleasure.

The affair had terminated so much differently from what he had feared.

He had looked for the certain death of young Sheldon at the hands of Chatard.

But the duelist had been merciful when it was in his power to be merciless, for he could have driven his sword into the heart of his foe as well as cutting open his sword-arm.

Stopping at Mrs. Girard's family physician on the way, Duncan Chatard had told him to hasten to the mansion, for he had stated to Valour that he would do so.

Then he drove home for his breakfast, accompanied by Pierre Bernard.

The home of the duelist was one of the finest in the city, a fine old mansion situated in the center of extensive grounds, with gardens, lawn and stables all walled in so that it was as secluded as a country place.

Sumptuously furnished, the servants were well trained, and the master lived on the best in the land, and the breakfast that he and his guest sat down to was certainly a most tempting one.

In the mean time Rupert Sheldon had been driven with all speed to his aunt's, accompanied by Valour.

Irene saw them enter, her brother pale and weak from loss of blood, and she sprang to his side just as the doctor drove up.

"You are wounded, brother?"

"Yes, but it is not serious, I think."

"And—"

"Oh, he escaped, for he has Satan's luck; but where is Scofield?"

"In the parlor."

"In the parlor?" asked the brother with surprise.

"Yes, he is asleep, or rather under the influence of a drug I gave him last night."

"My God, Miss Sheldon! I fear you have done Scofield a great wrong," cried Valour, and he went to the parlor at once, leaving Rupert Sheldon in the care of the physician.

He found the young officer seated upon the sofa, his eyes staring about him as though he was dazed.

"Scofield, come, rouse yourself, man."

Still the vacant stare, and it was not until the old negress gave him something to drink, which she said would take off the effects of the drug, that he seemed to recover his senses.

Then he turned to Valour and asked:

"What does it all mean?"

"Have I been drunk, and have you come for me because I was late?"

"I only remember that I seemed to fall last night, my head reeled and— Great Heaven! what about Chatard?" and he grasped Valour's hand with terrible force.

"Claude, forgive me, for I was the cause of all."

"Your quarrel with Mr. Chatard was on our account, and knowing my brother Rupert's skill I sent for him, told him all, and asked him to meet your enemy in your stead, and, sparing his life, to place him under a debt he could never repay."

"Have I done anything wrong, Claude?"

He had turned white at her words, and replied nervously:

"I hope not so great a wrong, Irene, that it cannot be remedied; but of this duel?"

"Rupert's sword-arm was cut open by Chatard, who I must say acted well, for he had his life in his hands," Valour said.

"Then Rupert owes the debt of life to Chatard?"

"Yes, Scofield."

"I will see Rupert, and then, Valour, we will go to my hotel."

Then turning to the maiden he continued:

"I hope, Irene, that it will not be said that you sought to save me by the sacrifice of your brother."

"Oh, Claude! but I believed Rupert could never meet his master."

"Chatard is no ordinary man, Irene; but I must be moving, and get off the influence of this drug— There, Irene, I forgive you, for the harm done can be remedied."

As they entered Rupert's room they found that the doctor had dressed the wound, and pronounced it one to be most carefully nursed, or he would not answer for the result.

"My noble friend, this was for me," said Claude Scofield, feelingly.

"No, it was my old feud that you took upon yourself, Scofield, so let it rest at that."

"I am only sorry it was not my hand that gave the wound; but that fellow is a devil with a rapier, and I will tell you that never before have I met my match, and for years I have practiced with swords."

"But let it rest at this."

Claude Scofield said no more, but soon after departed, accompanied by Valour.

"To the Chatard home," was the order he gave the driver, and Duncan Chatard and Planter Bernard were just rising from the breakfast-table when the butler brought in word that two gentlemen wished to see his master.

In his indolent way Duncan Chatard entered the parlor, and bowed as he saw who were his visitors.

"Mr. Chatard, circumstances over which I had no control prevented my meeting you this morning, as agreed; but I am here now to ask pardon for the failure to do so, and to say that I am wholly at your service, sir, when and where you may wish."

A gleam of triumph shot through the eyes of the duelist as he replied:

"I sent you a challenge, Captain Scofield, under the impression that you were a brave man; but your non-appearance this morning debars you from any claim upon me, for no gentleman will meet a coward on the field of honor."

"My God, Chatard, retract those words!" cried Valour, excitedly.

But Claude Scofield was calm, fearfully so, and as he stepped nearer to his insulter he seemed not about to strike him, but, quick as a flash, a quickness born of his border experience, he drew and leveled a pistol right in the face of the duelist.

Then came the words, quivering with intense emotion:

"Retract those words, Duncan Chatard, or by the Lord above I will kill you in your tracks! Yes, and pledge yourself to meet me and fight the duel we should have fought this morning."

"Quick, sir, obey, or I will kill you!"

There was no doubting the words of the soldier. He saw that he had a desperate man to deal with, one who meant to dishonor him by branding him to the world as a coward.

Sooner would he be tried as a murderer than be condemned as a coward.

The plot of the duelist he saw at a glance, and being armed, he cast all upon the die, and made his threat.

Chatard was taken by surprise. He had not expected this move, and he knew he was fairly caught.

That the young soldier would keep his threat, he did not for a moment doubt; so he could do but one thing, and he did it gracefully.

"You have me in your power, Captain Scofield, and I have no desire to be murdered, nor to have an army officer hanged as my murderer, so I will grant you the meeting you demand, but I will not retract my words until your presence there proves you to be the brave man I have thought you up to this morning."

Instantly the pistol was lowered, and Scofield said:

"The meeting is what I demand, sir, so I am content. Mr. Valour will arrange with your friend," and he left the room and returned to his carriage.

Soon after Valour came out and joined him, and the carriage rolled toward the hotel San Luis.

"At sunset this evening, Scofield, on the same field where he killed Bennett Sheldon and others."

"And the weapons?"

"He chose pistols, and he means to kill you, I am sure, for he said that where he had been merciful to Rupert Sheldon, to you he would be merciless."

"The weapons suit me, and, after his words

to me I too will be merciless, for I well know now why he is anxious to have my life.

"Valour, I shall kill that duelist if in my power to do so."

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE FIELD.

IN the various duels which he had fought, Duncan Chatard had always seemed to have right on his side, that is as judged by the code of dueling.

The vendetta that had existed between the Sheldons and Chatards had caused the loss of a number of valuable lives; but since the death of Bennett Sheldon at the hand of the duelist, no move had been made by either side to renew the quarrel.

The duelist was the last of his race, and if persons shunned him as one who held human life cheaply, they could make no charge against his honor, and certainly were compelled to admire him as a brilliant man of the world.

He came of an old family, as has been said, and had been left a grand old house with a fortune to keep up a life of luxury.

Doctor Sheldon had slain his father in a duel, and it was thought that young Chatard would call the slayer out.

But he did not. Years went by and at last a chance came when Bennett Sheldon met Duncan Chatard face to face as claimants for the hand of a lady for a dance.

The silly girl should have declined to dance with either, as she had thoughtlessly engaged herself to both; but instead she said:

"Mr. Chatard, you are the best dancer, so I will decide in your favor."

Bennett Sheldon was in love with the girl, and maddened by her words, he drank deeply and picked a quarrel with Duncan Chatard, the result being that he was killed in the duel that followed.

Others also had picked quarrels with Duncan Chatard to find their graves but too quickly, and thus it was that he gained the name of a duelist, while it was said that he had never yet sought a quarrel with an enemy, but met it without mercy when it came.

Men stood in a certain awe of him, while women admired and pitied him.

There was that about the man to command respect and win admiration, and yet one could not but feel that his heartaches must be fearful.

Between Chatard and Planter Bernard the strange friendship referred to had sprung up.

That both were reckless gamblers the outside world did not know, and yet Duncan Chatard was as desperate a man in a game of cards as he was in a game of life and death.

He played well, boldly, and his luck was wonderful, and no one had the audacity to call it other than luck, if they thought there was any underhand work in his playing.

If Duncan Chatard had ever loved a woman the world did not know it, and certain it was that Irene, the daughter of a hated race to him, won his deepest affection.

He had such a way of conquering all foes, that he had an idea that he could make her step across the gulf that divided them and become his wife.

So why should she hate him when she knew that he was Duncan Chatard?

So he reasoned, and that he strove hard to win the reader has seen.

Had she consented to marry him, he knew that the marriage must be a secret one.

The world might gossip, but not before him.

He would then write her father and brother, ask them to forgive, forget, and bury the hatchet, and be glad if they would do so.

If they refused, then he would seek a home elsewhere with his bride.

If they followed in anger, their lives be upon their own heads.

So he had determined when he sought Irene at her home.

The reader knows the result—the duelist lost in the game of love.

Then came the scene with Captain Claude Scofield.

To hear the young captain say that he was engaged to Miss Irene Sheldon, the woman whom he knew at heart loved him, broke all barriers of his reserve, and he threw the lie in his teeth.

If, as a friend of the Sheldons, Captain Scofield had refused to take the hand of the duelist, then would Chatard have replied, pleasantly:

"You are right, sir, and I can appreciate your position."

But to refuse as the intended husband of Irene caused the duelist to utter the words that he did.

When Rupert Sheldon came instead of Claude Scofield to the field, Duncan Chatard well knew that some good reason had detained the soldier.

Not once did he doubt him.

But he was glad to have Rupert Sheldon take his place.

He wished to spare his life to place him under obligations to him, while at the same time he would show to Irene that he had not taken her brother's life when he was at his mercy.

It would prove to her that he had forgiven

her cruel words to him at the grave of Bennett Sheldon, and was willing to forget the past.

He could have disarmed Rupert Sheldon, for, splendid swordsman though the young planter was, the duelist was a better one, and he kept a French master of the sword under his pay especially to keep him in practice.

But, in disarming him, he feared the fight would be renewed, and he wished to wound him in the sword-arm, thus ending the affair.

But Duncan Chatard had not the remotest idea of not meeting Captain Scofield.

No, that quarrel was simply postponed.

The soldier was the man upon whom he could wreak his vengeance.

Irene loved him, so she could not love the soldier.

He, Scofield, was rich, of good family, had greatly distinguished himself, the Scofield and Sheldon plantations on the Bay of St. Louis adjoined, and so the marriage was made up, without doubt, by the father.

So reasoned Duncan Chatard, and he felt that Claude Scofield should be removed out of his way.

His insulting words to the young officer, when he called, he trusted might prevent a duel, and thus save the life of the soldier, though it would bring dishonor upon him.

He had, however, been thwarted by the desperate act of Claude Scofield, who had leveled a pistol at his head and had him at his mercy.

So it was that the duel was arranged, and each man, now with bitterest hatred in his heart for the other, vowed to kill his adversary.

Valour had found Pierre Bernard again the second of the duelist, and when the soldier and his second arrived upon the field they discovered their adversaries already there.

"I always make it a rule to be the first on the field, and the first to leave it," Duncan Chatard had said to the planter, who remarked:

"You have been strangely lucky so far, Chatard; but you are to meet a dangerous foe this time."

"I consider that young Sheldon is a decidedly dangerous man to meet, planter."

"Yes, but a novice."

"Not with a sword, for he has been a hard student of the weapon, take my word for it, and he is equally as good a shot, I'll warrant, for he was doubtless practicing to meet me some day."

"But Scofield is a dangerous man in a fight, I have heard."

"He belies his looks if he is not; but I shall kill him if I can, and mark my words, I am not here to be killed."

"But should you be, my dear Chatard, you know you hold certain notes of mine, which would bring your heirs down upon me for all I am worth about."

"Ah, yes, and if I am killed I wish to protect you, my friend, so take this wallet."

"The notes are all in there, and considerable money, too."

"If I die, it is yours; but if not, you will of course return it as it is?"

"Of course; but here come our friends," said the planter, as he pocketed the wallet so valuable to him.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWO SHOTS.

CAPTAIN SCOFIELD and his second had driven to the field in a carriage, and, contrary to their going in the morning, Duncan Chatard and the planter had driven to the scene in the stylish turnout of the duelist, instead of riding there on horseback.

The fact was, Duncan Chatard was a man who left nothing undone to insure success, and he meant not to excite himself by a horseback ride.

The place chosen was the scene of many a deadly meeting. There had fallen scores of brave men, and half a dozen times before had Duncan Chatard been there, and never had his adversary left the spot alive!

There he had slain Bennett Sheldon, years before, and, as he reached the scene, what phantoms of the past must have risen before him of the graves he had made in his few years of manhood.

It was a pretty spot, a grove of spreading live-oaks shading a plot of velvety grass, which grew luxuriantly as though nourished by the blood the ground had drank.

"Do you see that spot on this tree, planter?" asked the duelist, pointing to a hole in the oak nearest him.

"Yes, it looks like a bullet-mark."

"It is, for there entered the bullet of Young Fielding whom, you may remember, I killed last fall. I spared him the first shot, for I did not wish to kill him, and yet he fired at my heart. The second time I shot him in the brain, and his shot struck there."

"Here they are, and please place me where I now stand, if you win the toss for position, as I am rather attached to this spot."

"I will if I win the position," was the reply, and the two turned to bow to Captain Scofield

and Valour who had gotten out of the carriage and approached, followed by a negro footman bearing the box of dueling pistols.

The carriage of Duncan Chatard also stood apart, and his footman had brought an ominous-looking box and placed it near the tree.

The sun was yet above the horizon, and the evening was calm and beautiful.

A mocking-bird was singing near by in a tree, and afar off another was answering his mates.

Then, by a strange coincidence, a whip-poor-will gave his mournful call from not far distant, and the mocking-bird at once took up the mournful note and repeated it over and over again.

All noticed it, and it seemed like a forewarning of death.

Both Valour and Planter Bernard seemed impressed, and the former muttered:

"Curse the bird!"

"The negroes take it as an ill-omen," returned the planter, pointing toward the coachman and footman, who were evidently very nervous over the mournful cries of the bird.

If either of the two men who had come there to face death, noticed the sad notes, their faces did not show it.

Captain Scofield had not fully recovered from the effects of the drug, for his face was pale, his eyes heavy; but he was the very picture of calm courage in the face of danger.

The duelist leaned with folded arms against a tree, a cigar between his lips, and his eyes watching the smoke as it curled upward.

Other than interest in the curling smoke did not rest upon his face.

What was really in heart and brain his features did not reveal.

The two seconds tossed up a gold coin for position, and Valour won.

It seemed strange that he chose for his principal the very spot which Duncan Chatard had wished to stand upon.

Planter Bernard looked uneasy at this.

He might get back his notes by the duelist's death; but he was really attached to the man, and did not wish to have him die to benefit himself.

Then the toss was made for the word.

Valour again won, and Pierre Bernard looked so blue, all seemed so ominous to him, that Duncan Chatard, who was now watching his face, said with a light laugh:

"Why, planter, you look as blue as a parson on a rainy day."

"I feel blue," was the low-uttered response.

Then all was ready, the weapons, beautiful weapons they were, too, were loaded, ready to hand to the men who meant to use them with deadly result.

Ten paces distant they stood, the duelist on the very spot where others had stood when shot down by his dead-shot aim; but no sign on his stern, handsome face betrayed that he thought of those gone before—gone through him.

Upon the spot where the duelist had stood in his other affairs, was Captain Scofield.

His eyes lost their heavy look, his face showed a slight tinge of color, like the flush coming upon the soldier's face in battle, and he was ready to lose life or seek death.

Neither man had measured the other, but each knew that before him was one to dread.

The duelist had won fame upon the field where it was man to man, while the soldier had won promotion upon the battle-field for gallant deeds.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

The voice of the planter seemed to break harshly upon the scene.

It startled the mocking-bird from its perch, and it flew away to seek a retreat for the night.

The sun was just going down behind the trees, sinking out of sight as a life might go.

"I am ready," came in a distinct voice from the soldier, calmly uttered as he might issue a command on a parade.

The duelist bowed, but spoke not.

"One, two, three—fire!"

Neither man fired until the last word, *fire*, when they might have both fired at the word *one*.

The pistols cracked together, as one weapon, and both men went down as though shot through the heart.

Pierre Bernard sprang to the side of his friend.

He lay white and motionless, and in the center of the forehead, just below the dark hair, was a red wound.

"He is dead! my God, what a dead-shot that was!"

So said the planter, and he turned to his adversaries.

Valour was kneeling by the side of his friend, supporting him.

The face of the soldier was blanched; he gasped for breath, but was conscious.

On his left side, it seemed, just over the heart, the bullet had cut into the flesh. Valour shook his head, but Claude Scofield saw the motion and understood it.

"It was well intended, but I do not think it is fatal. Get to the hotel at once."

He spoke with an effort, but that he spoke at all was encouraging.

He did not ask about his enemy, for he seemed to feel that there was no use.

He knew his only deadly aim.

The planter aided Valour and they bore the soldier to the carriage, and at once the vehicle started rapidly for the town.

Then in the gathering twilight Pierre Bernard called to the footman of Chatard's carriage, and they moved toward the prostrate, motionless form.

But, as the planter bent over it the eyes opened and he cried in really joyous tones:

"Thank God he is not dead. But, can there be hope?"

The hand of the duelist was slowly raised until it touched the wound.

The fingers touched it as a surgeon's might, and then came the words:

"The bullet glanced upward, and the skull is not broken. His aim was deadly."

"Have you sent his body home?"

"Yes, Valour took him to the hotel in all haste, for he is not dead."

"Not dead? Why, I shot him through the heart."

"Your bullet must have glanced, for he is not dead, and said himself he did not think the wound fatal."

"Then this work is all to be done over, some day."

"Take me home, my good friend, for I am suffering with my head," and the eyes closed like one going to sleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS MINIATURE.

THE carriage that bore Valour and the wounded soldier back to town, took the nearest way, and that led by the home of Madam Girard.

A wagon-train just there caused it to slacken up for an instant, and standing at the side gate opening into the wall, was Irene Sheldon.

One glance in the gathering twilight and she recognized Valour and saw that he held a form in his arms.

Quickly she sprang out upon the banquette, and as the vehicle was about to dash on she cried sternly:

"Hold!"

Then she was at the side of the carriage and asked quickly:

"Monsieur Valour, whom have you there, wounded or dead?"

"It is Captain Scofield, Miss Sheldon, but he is not dead," said the startled Valour.

"Bring him here at once—the doctor is now with my brother."

"Obey me, for I will prepare for him."

Valour was only too glad to obey, well knowing that the care his friend would receive at Madam Girard's luxurious home would do much toward his recovery.

Then the doctor was on the spot, and that was the first thing to consider.

Claude Scofield would have demurred, but he was too weak to talk, and the footman and Valour bore him into the garden, through the gate which Irene had left open.

As they reached the house, Madam Girard met them and led the way to the best guest's chamber, and there the doctor awaited them, having fortunately been upon the scene, on his evening visit to Rupert Sheldon, whom he had found as well as he expected.

"That Chatard is a devil, and has done red work this day," muttered the surgeon, and he prepared to take the soldier in charge.

The wound, as the duelist had said, had been aimed at the heart.

It had struck just over it, and had it continued straight on, Claude Scofield would never have uttered another word.

But just over his heart, in a little morocco case was a small miniature, the back of solid gold.

The back was outward, the bullet dented it, but glanced, and cut its way to one side, entering to the left of the heart and lodging in the body.

The pocket in which the miniature was carried, and the fact that it showed evidence of having been long worn, proved that it had not been put there as a protection.

The doctor removed it, and said, dryly:

"This saved you, Captain Scofield."

He did not glance at the face on the other side, but held it toward the wounded man, who tried to raise his hand to take it.

The doctor placed the miniature under the pillow, and then coolly went on with his work, Valour aiding him.

At last the wound was dressed, and the doctor left the room.

In the hall he met Irene, who drew him into the parlor.

"How did you find my brother, doctor?"

"Let us speak of the one who is nearest death first, Miss Irene, for I know what you would ask," cruelly said the doctor.

"Will he live?"

"Who?"

"Doctor, don't be cruel."

"Miss Irene, don't be deceitful; but frankly, the young captain has chances in his favor for

getting well; but the wound is an ugly one and I cannot find the bullet.

"But for a miniature he wore over his heart I would not be needed, but the undertaker would."

"A miniature?"

"Yes, one with a back of solid gold, fortunately for him, as the bullet glanced upon it."

"He carried it in a morocco case in his waistcoat pocket, so you can flatter yourself that you saved his life."

"I saved his life, Doctor Barry?" asked Irene with surprise.

"Yes, you, or rather your miniature."

"Doctor Barry, it is not my miniature, sir," and Irene turned away.

"Aha! here's a pretty mess I've gotten into; but, I felt sure it was hers," muttered the doctor as he hastened from the house to go on his round of visits.

Hardly had he gone when Irene sunk down in a chair and moaned.

"A miniature saved his life."

"If Claude Scofield is not to be trusted, who can be?"

As she spoke Valour entered the room.

"You have seen Doctor Barry?" he said.

"Yes."

"He gives hope, and I am going now, but will return to aid in nursing if I am needed."

"You are ever welcome here, Mr. Valour, as you know; but there will be no need to make a nurse of you."

"Now tell me how it all occurred?"

She spoke quietly, but her face belied the calmness of her words and manner.

"Of course Scofield would not allow Chatard to suspect he had intentionally remained away this morning, so he went to call on him, with me, and the duel was arranged for sunset."

"It was fought with pistols, both fired at the same instant and both fell, Scofield wounded as you have seen."

"And Mr. Chatard?"

"Fell dead, for the bullet of Scofield entered just here," and Girard Valour placed his hand upon the spot where he had seen the wound on his forehead.

He did not understand the low cry uttered by Irene Sheldon, as she sunk upon a divan and covered her face with her hands.

He mistook it for horror at the scene he had described, and dread that Captain Scofield might die.

"Permit me to say, Miss Irene, that but for your miniature, which Scofield wore in his waistcoat pocket over his heart, he would have been instantly killed."

"Each man fired with deadly aim."

"It was not my miniature, sir."

"Not your miniature? Why surely—"

"No, it was not my miniature."

Girard Valour looked surprised.

He thought he saw jealousy struggling with grief in the face of the young girl; but under the circumstances he was at a loss what to say, so grasping Irene's hand in warm sympathy, he left the room, and returned to his hotel, for his home was on his plantation some distance from the city.

When he had gone Irene sunk down upon the divan the very picture of grief.

She uttered no moan, she shed no tears, but sat there in silence.

Soon old Lize, the negress, entered.

"I were a-lookin' fer yer, honey."

"He are sleepin' and quiet as a leetle baby, so I jist took his puss, watch and chain and this pictur'-lookit fer you ter keep, as it hain't allus best ter hev 'em 'round."

"Don't worry too much, honey, fer he don't really look like a dyin' man."

"Comfort yer sweet soul all yer kin, and ole Lize will watch by him as she have by you when you was a leetle baby."

"Here, honey, here is ther things."

She slipped them all into the lap of Irene, a purse, well-filled, a note-book, watch and chain, and the miniature.

The little morocco case was broken, shattered by the bullet upon one side, and an indentation was in the smooth gold back.

The glass over the face of the miniature was unbroken.

But the face?

It was that of a young and beautiful girl, one who could scarcely be over eighteen, and with large blue eyes that seemed to look into the very depths of one's soul.

Beneath the miniature was engraven a name:

"HELENE."

That was all.

Long did Irene gaze at the beautiful miniature.

What her thoughts were who can tell?

At last she arose and went to her room.

There she locked them all up together, and then, changing her evening dress for an out-of-door costume, she put on a heavy veil and slipped out of the mansion, leaving the garden by the gate in the wall through which the wounded soldier had been brought.

She had the key, and locked the gate after her.

Then she hesitated, half-turned back; but, as

though she had made up her mind to some course, she walked rapidly down the street in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TELL-TALE.

THE struggle in the heart and brain of Irene was a bitter one indeed.

It was a struggle such as few young girls could suffer and keep their reason.

The love of her heart was all in all to her, and she had set her whole heart upon the man she had known as Duncan, on her voyage across the ocean.

When she had discovered that he was to her one whom she had been taught to abhor, to hate, to dread, it had not changed her love.

He had sinned against her, yes, in taking her brother's life, and a feud to the death had existed between her family and his.

But she loved him, Duncan Chatard.

She could not marry him, but yet she loved him.

She must keep him away from her presence, pretend to hate him, or she might forget the dead and live alone for the living.

When she had driven Duncan Chatard from her, as she stood by her brother's grave, she had been glad to know that a man so noble as was Claude Scofield had asked for her hand.

It would help her to forget the past.

He was all that a woman could wish, and he would teach her to love him.

So it was that she decided as she did.

Then came the challenge, and she knew her weakness for the duelist when she urged her brother Rupert to meet him, to disarm him, but not to kill him.

She had every confidence that her brave brother could master the duelist.

The result was so different from her anticipations, she was almost stunned by the shock.

Then came the second duel, and the chance which had taken her to the gate, just as the carriage came along bearing Claude Scofield sorely wounded.

She had believed it but a repetition of the affair of the morning.

She did not believe that the duelist was injured, and she felt that she could see why he spared her brother but meant to kill her lover.

The words of Valour stunned her.

Could it be that Duncan Chatard was dead?

Could it be that her betrothed would recover?

Could she marry the man who had slain the one whom she so dearly had loved?

She was like one walking in her sleep, it appeared to her.

She saw all, yet knew not how to act.

Then came a feeling of real joy that Duncan Chatard was dead.

Dead, she could love him.

But then rose the miniature that had saved the life of Claude Scofield, and could it be that he was untrue to her?

This she would leave until afterward; but now she must carry out a resolve she had made.

So it was that she had dressed herself for the street and, heavily veiled, had secretly left the house.

She wended her way along on foot, fearing nothing in the state of mind she then was.

It was a walk of some distance; but she knew well the way, and at last rested her hand upon the gate-bell that would admit her into the spacious grounds of the Chatard mansion.

She hesitated for some time, and then, as if not to be deterred from her purpose, she pulled the bell.

She heard the distant clang in the servant's hall, and soon an old man appeared beneath the lamp that hung over the gate.

"This is the home of Mr. Chatard?" she said, as the gate was opened.

The old negro recognized the lady in the bearing and words of the veiled visitor, so he said politely:

"Yes, Mistis."

"I am an old friend of his, and, as I cannot come when others do, I would be so grateful if you would let me see him before—he—is—buried."

"My massa hain't dead, missy."

"Not dead! he was not killed in a duel to-day?" and the voice of the young girl rung out like a bugle on the still night air.

"No, missy, t'ank de Lor' he were not kilt, but de bullet hit him in de head and glanced off, but de doctor say he be all right soon, and he certainly talk pretty pert."

Irene had grasped the gate for support.

She felt herself reeling, and pressed heavily against the wall.

She had come to see the body of the man she loved.

She wished to have one looked at it, and then go away and bury all memory of the past in the grave with the dead man.

That he was alive never entered her mind after what Valour had said.

That it might be that he was stunned by the shock, and they believe him dead at first, she could understand.

"Not dead! he lives!"

"Yes, missy, and as you seem to like him so

much come in, for maybe massa will see you if I tell him."

She uttered a cry of terror, turned and fled.

The negro gazed after her in wonder, and saw her disappear in the darkness.

Then he caught sight of her handkerchief, which she had let fall from her hand in her flight.

Picking it up he re-entered the gate, locked it and made his way to the mansion.

His master was asleep, the nurse said, so he would not disturb him until morning.

In the morning the duelist awoke with a very sore head.

The shock had been a severe one, and the bullet had flattened out against the skull and had to be cut out by the doctor.

The bone was not fractured, the doctor said, but the concussion was severe and the greatest care must be used or an attack of brain fever would follow and the bullet after all do its worst by causing death in that way.

Old Toby took the place of the nurse, who was at breakfast.

"Massa?" he said softly, as he saw that the wounded man was watching him.

"Yes, Toby."

"I has somethin' to tell you, sah."

"Well?"

"Does yer feel well enough to hear it, sah?"

"My head aches, and is very sore, while if I move I get dizzy."

"It was a close call, Toby."

"Yas, sah, so close she thought you was dead."

"Who?"

"The lady."

"What lady?"

"De one dat called last night, sah."

"Did a lady call here last night?"

"Yes, sah."

"Who was she?"

"Don't know, sah, for she weared a veil, and I c'udn't see her countenance in de slightest particular," and old Toby grinned at his success in the use of "big words," as he called them.

"What did she come for?"

"To see your corpse, sah."

"My what?"

"Your corpse, sah, for she thought you was dead."

The duelist smiled.

He was interested, and said:

"Tell me all about her coming, Toby."

The negro did so, giving the particulars of Irene's visit just as it had occurred.

The duelist became interested, and when he heard how the visitor had uttered a cry and fled when told by Toby to come in, he seemed surprised, and said:

"Who can she be, I wonder?"

"Don't know, massa, but she drop this han'k'-chief as she run away."

The wounded man seized the 'kerchief.

It was of the finest material, and in one corner were two letters embroidered.

They were:

"I. S."

"That will do, Toby," said the duelist, softly, and he closed his eyes as though to sleep; but in his hand he held the tell-tale handkerchief.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VISITOR TO ORANGELANDS.

THE news of the double duel spread like wild-fire over the town.

It became known that Rupert Sheldon had fought with Duncan Chatard, and, as those interested had nothing to say about the affair, it was reported that the young planter had challenged the duelist to avenge his brother's death.

Of course it was known that Chatard had not been wounded, and Rupert Sheldon had been, it was said, most dangerously.

Then came the story of the second affair.

The rumors about this at first were that both men had been killed, and those who did not like the duelist began to talk very boldly about his day having come at last.

Then it was said that he was dead, and the soldier wounded.

At last the truth became known, that both men were seriously wounded.

Of course it was said that the young soldier had attempted to avenge Rupert Sheldon.

It had been a battle of giants between two such men as were Chatard and Scofield and the duelist had at last met his match.

Whether either, or both men would die no one seemed to know, until one day the question was settled by the appearance upon the street of the duelist himself.

He looked pale, and a trifle haggard; but his manners were as courtly as ever, and his smile to his friends just the same.

He did not speak of the affair, and when he took his hat off it could be seen how close he had been to death.

Pierre Bernard had returned home, as also had Valour, as their services were no longer needed, and so no one could get at the exact state of affairs, for not a soul was there who cared to ask the duelist for the facts in the case.

As to whether Captain Claude Scofield would or would not live, no one seemed to know; but

that he was in great danger from his wound there seemed to be no doubt.

After appearing for several days upon the streets, Duncan Chatard disappeared.

Rumor at once said that he had been wounded in another duel.

Doctor Sheldon had been seen in the city, and of course the gossips had it that he had come to fight the duelist.

He had killed the father, so why not do as much for the son, they said.

But whatever the first motive that had brought Doctor Sheldon to the city, he certainly put it aside to devote himself to his wounded son and Claude Scofield.

The wound of Rupert Sheldon had been a severe one, and unless properly cared for might cause him a lame arm for life.

The wound of the young soldier was a dangerous one, and Doctor Barry was very glad to have the aid of the skillful army surgeon who in his earlier life had seen so much of wounds.

If Doctor Sheldon had any intention of meeting the duelist, he kept such intention to himself.

Thus the time dragged along at the elegant guard-house, Irene proving herself a devoted nurse to both her brother and lover.

Not a word had she said about the miniature, and if Claude Scofield had a secret locked in his breast, a secret love for the fair Helene, the original of the miniature, Irene, also, had her visit to the house of Duncan Scofield to remember, and to hide from all others.

In the mean time the duelist had accepted the invitation of Planter Bernard to run up to Orangelands for a visit.

He was met by the planter most warmly, and Anita received him with a kindness that showed he had her sympathy, and did all in her power to make his stay a pleasant one.

One day, as he was lazily reclining in the hammock upon the veranda, his thoughts were of Irene Sheldon.

"Ah, me! it can never be, so why this bootless struggle for a love I can never know happiness with?"

"Better far that I give back to Bernard his notes, and win the love of his sweet daughter, for though I feel and know that Irene loves me, that young soldier will challenge me again when he is well, and so it will go on, for if I kill him, then her brother will seek revenge, and then her father."

"So will it be until the end, unless I marry this sweet girl, and go far from here— Ah! a steamboat is landing at this place."

He saw a steamboat run in and land a passenger, after which it continued on up the river.

The passenger came slowly on toward the mansion, and the duelist arose to meet him, for the planter and his daughter were away driving.

"It is Fairix, the man who was Bennett Sheldon's second, and we have not been friendly since."

"This meeting is awkward, but I must face it."

There was no servant about, so the duelist rose and met the visitor as he reached the piazza.

"Mr. Fairix, I observe."

"In the absence of Mr. Bernard I must act as host, sir, so walk in, please."

The visitor bowed stiffly.

He was a man of middle age, solemn looking as an undertaker, and a gentleman.

"My visit, Mr. Chatard, is to you, sir, not to Mr. Bernard, and knowing that I could catch a down boat, and have an hour at Orangelands to see you, I came."

"Ah! be seated, and let me order you a glass of wine and refreshments."

"No, thank you, for I took dinner on the boat."

"Then, may I ask why you are here to see me, Mr. Fairix?"

"It is upon the same sad, unpleasant duty I called upon you years ago about."

"Ah, a duel, I suppose, for they seem to be getting fashionable nowadays."

"Yes, I come with a challenge for you."

"Indeed? And who is it that now seeks my life, may I ask?"

"Doctor Luke Sheldon."

"Upon what grounds, for as the slayer of my father, I think I should call him out."

"There has been an affair since then, sir, you recall."

"My wounding his son?"

"Prior to that event, Mr. Chatard."

"Ah! you refer to my having killed his son whose second you were?"

"I do."

"He has taken a long time to get revengeful on that old score, Mr. Fairix."

"He challenges you to meet him, sir, for he deems it his duty to place his life between you and those he loves."

"And the grounds of this challenge are simply to kill me that I may not kill his son, or intended son-in-law when they recover?"

"He has a dead son to avenge also."

"Ah, well, let the feud go on, as he wishes it; but I had hoped that there would be no more of

this accursed vendetta," and the duelist spoke more to himself than to his visitor.

"Doctor Sheldon demands a meeting, sir."

"Egad he shall have it."

"He would have challenged sooner; but wished to see that his son and Captain Scofield were beyond a set-back before doing so."

"And they are recovering?"

"They are."

"I am sincerely glad to hear it."

"I trust their wounds may leave them no ill results."

"So that they may meet you again?" and Mr. Fairix frowned.

"If so they wish, I must oblige, as in the present case."

"It is to save them that the doctor challenges you."

"Mr. Fairix, if you have any influence with your friend, urge him to let matters remain as they are."

"Now Doctor Sheldon's pluck is well known, and he killed my father, who believed himself invulnerable."

"But Rupert Sheldon and Captain Scofield are the most dangerous men I ever faced, and you know my experience has been considerable."

"I do not wish the life of another man upon my hands; but Doctor Luke Sheldon killed my father, and he means to kill me, so, by Heaven! if he does face me I shall show him no more mercy than I would a dog who sprung at me."

It was seldom that Duncan Chatard showed emotion.

Mr. Fairix was surprised and awed, and he did not at once reply.

Then he said:

"I come with my challenge, sir, but will urge against the meeting, as I have already done."

"I accept it, sir; but if you can prevent it, Octave Fairix, I will believe you my friend."

"Now name date, place, and weapons, and I will be there with my second."

"That is for you to do, Mr. Chatard, as the challenged party."

"I have no choice, so decide for yourself, please."

"Pistols—ten paces—to-morrow evening at sunset, and the place the live oak grove above Carrollton."

"All suit me, Mr. Fairix."

"Now let us have a glass of wine together, and I will walk with you to the landing, for I see your boat coming."

They entered the dining-room and drank together, and then chatting pleasantly, walked to the landing, where Octave Fairix took the boat back to the city.

"I must prevent this duel, for Chatard will kill Sheldon if they meet," said the second, as the boat steamed cityward.

CHAPTER XX.

THE NEWSPAPER PARAGRAPH.

FOR a long time did Duncan Chatard sit in the little rustic boat-house, watching the departing steamer.

At last he mused aloud:

"I hope he can prevent this affair, for though I love his daughter and can spare his son, I feel revengeful toward him."

"I saw him the day he shot my father, and he was full of venom, and his eyes flashed with triumph when he saw him fall."

"Some said, as he was a surgeon, had he wished, he could have stopped the hemorrhage and saved my father."

"But he did not, for his mission was to kill him."

"I spared Rupert Sheldon, so in honor he cannot call me out again."

"I will fire in the air, risking this man's fire, and he will be under obligation to me for his life, so thus the feud must end, and she will bless me—maybe then she will become my wife."

"But the lover?"

"Ah! he will challenge, I know he will, and next time there must be no mistake."

"Yes, I will spare her father," and so saying, he arose and went to the mansion.

The carriage drove up as he reached the steps, and Planter Bernard and Anita alighted.

They had stopped at the river village above, and had the mail.

There were some letters for the duelist, and he hastily glanced over them without comment.

Then Anita handed to him a paper that was marked.

He read it, and Anita saw his face blanch.

What he read was:

"MARRIED—at the Girard Mansion yesterday afternoon, by the Rev. Father Gresham, Miss Irene Sheldon, of Bay St. Louis, to Captain Claude Scofield, of the United States Army."

"The marriage was strictly private, and was hastened by the precarious position of the bridegroom, who was wounded in his duel with Duncan Chatard some weeks ago."

A moment stood the duelist after reading this, and then Anita saw how great the effort to control himself.

But he gained complete command of his voice

and face in a few seconds more, and said, in the pleasantest manner possible:

"We had a visitor, Miss Anita, while you were away, and he is a very handsome fellow."

"Indeed, and how did he come, and who was he?"

Three questions in one breath.

"But to reply, it was Mr. Octave Fairix, he came in the up-river boat, stayed half an hour and returned to the city on the boat going down."

"Why did he not remain, for I like Fairix?" the planter said.

"His visit was to me."

"I thought that you were not the best of friends?"

"We have not been, since I killed Bennett Sheldon; but he came to challenge me in the name of Doctor Sheldon."

Pierre Bernard sprang to his feet and Anita turned pale, while she said, in a low tone:

"Ah! will this killing never cease?"

"This should not be, Chatard," the planter said, angrily.

"It is not of my choosing, I assure you."

"The doctor thinks if he does not kill me, his son, and his son-in-law, will call me out again, and so he wishes to end the matter himself, so I had to consent, and will go down on the next boat to the city and find a second, for I will not ask you to serve me again."

"I will cheerfully do so, Chatard."

"No, it is best not, for I do not wish Miss Anita to think I lead you astray."

His manner was really cheerful, and Anita wondered at the nerve of the man.

That the reading of the newspaper paragraph had deeply moved him she had seen; but why, she could not guess, for he alone held the love-secret of his heart.

After supper, a servant was put on watch for a coming boat, and all ready to start, Duncan Chatard sat in the library with his host.

Anita had gone into the parlor and was giving herself the blues by singing some sad old melodies to her accompaniment upon the guitar.

"Planter, before I go, I wish to hand you back your notes again, but I must trust to your honor to carry out your part of the compact between us."

"Now, I may be killed, for life is as uncertain as death is sure; but I don't intend to be if I can avoid it."

"If I am, you will find that my will is made, and neither yourself or daughter are forgotten, and you are one of the executors."

"Now, here are the notes, and you may expect me back in three days to formally ask for the hand of your daughter, and I shall hope to make her my wife at a very early day."

Planter Bernard had grasped the notes.

They represented to him his fortune.

Were they claimed by the duelist, then his plantation, negroes and all would go, and what Anita had alone would be left.

But at the words of the duelist, the notes dropped from his hand and it fell upon his knees as though the arm was suddenly paralyzed.

The face became livid, and the man's eyes stared into those of the duelist with startling effect.

"Why, Mr. Bernard, what ails you?" cried Duncan Chatard anxiously.

"Give me some wine," he gasped.

The decanter sat on the table, a glass was poured out by Chatard, and the planter drank it at one swallow.

"I fear you are ill, planter."

"No, I was alarmed at your words."

"Sit down, Chatard, and let me tell you that which will surprise, pain, perhaps anger you."

The duelist saw that his host was in deep earnest.

Something moved him far beyond the usual, and he was anxious to know what it was.

"Shut the door, please, and lock it, for we must not be disturbed."

The duelist obeyed, and returned to his seat near the planter, who said:

"Chatard, I have deceived you."

"Deceived me?"

"Yes."

"How, pray?"

"I have wronged you, too."

"I cannot see how."

"I have a confession to make to you, and you can hold me responsible for my acts, for I will meet it."

"I have always liked you, always been your friend, and we have been in close companionship for years, have we not?"

"We have."

"Now what I did, my dear Chatard, was not from any feeling against you, but because I did not wish you to become nearer to me—that is to marry my child."

"Ah!"

"I feared you would not make her happy, and I dreaded to see her your wife."

"Yet you staked her hand against the notes I held of yours."

"Yes, and meant to keep my contract when I did so."

"I know that Anita likes you, she regards you

as she might a brother; but she abhors dueling, and feels deeply for you as the slayer of your fellow-men.

"She does not condemn you, for she knows all about your affairs; but she suffers for you, and feels that you must be tortured by remorse."

"With this feeling as your friend, as your wife she would be utterly wretched, I know, and it was to save her that I acted as I did."

"And what did you do, my friend, that was so terrible in your eyes?"

"Something that may seem far worse in yours."

"Out with it and let me be the judge."

"First let me return these notes, and at maturity you can claim their equivalent."

"But why?"

"Because I can never keep my compact."

"Why not?"

"I cannot give you the hand of my daughter."

"Why, I ask you?"

"Chatard, you are a married man."

"It is false utterly, wholly, shamefully false!" and the voice of the duelist quivered with anger.

"It is true."

The duelist was now calm again, and said:

"Now I can kill with good grace, when I find out who it is that has told you this malicious lie against me."

"No one has told me, Chatard."

"How did you get such an idea into your head?"

"That is the confession I have to make," was the low reply of Pierre Bernard.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CONFESSION.

"You certainly seem much moved, my dear friend, about what you have to tell me; but you may rest assured that I will not be angry, so let me hear your confession, as you call it," said Duncan Chatard, as he saw how hard it seemed for the planter to tell what he dreaded, yet appeared to wish to make known.

"Do you remember the young lady who was visiting us some months ago?"

"Do you refer to Miss Eleanor Graydon of Virginia?"

"Yes."

"Who could ever forget her beautiful face?"

"I believe you admire her very much?"

"Exceedingly; she is one of the few whom I do, for she, as does your daughter, seemed to understand me."

"You think her beautiful?"

"Decidedly so, and perfect in form, while her manner was most winning."

"She is a very fascinating girl, planter."

"I am glad you think so," said the planter with a sigh of relief.

"But why these questions?"

"She is very rich, you know, in fact one of the richest young ladies in her State."

"I hope she will marry well, for she deserves it."

"She is already married, Chatard."

"Not when did you get this news, for, from your questions I had half an idea that you meant to marry her yourself."

"Ah, no, not that, not that!"

"Who did she marry?"

"Chatard, I will not heat about the bush, but come to the truth at once."

"I made my compact with you, regarding Anita's hand, when Miss Graydon was here visiting my daughter."

"I was forced to do so, because I saw no escape for me, and I feared not to do so as you might claim the note's value and thus bring ruin upon me."

"I know that you liked Anita, but felt that you did not love her, so I was driven to the wall and did that which I am now answerable to you for, if you demand it, for I shall make a clean breast of it, be the consequences what they may."

"I am all attention, planter."

"You recall I suggested that you should give an exhibition of your wonderful pistol-shooting?"

"I recall it."

"Somehow I overcharged the weapons and you did not shoot at your best."

"Yes, and I suggested that you overcharged in loading, so loaded myself."

"Yes, and do you remember the wager?"

"Yes, you suggested the hand of Miss Graydon."

"I saw that you were on your mettle, and that you would shoot true, so I made that suggestion, and hinted to you about what shots you could make."

"I remember."

"If you put eighteen shots, the number of years that Miss Graydon was old, into a rim drawn around the ace of hearts, without touching, you were to claim her hand in marriage."

"Yes, in a mock-marriage, which she consented to."

"True, for she did not believe it could be done, nor did she think the marriage was a serious one."

"A serious one?"

"Yes, a real ceremony!"

"It was the ceremony of marriage, which you read from the prayer book."

"Yes."

"That does not make it real, planter."

"It does."

"Why?" and the duelist was perfectly cool.

"I knew what I was doing, and I did it to save my child from you, by binding you to another."

"Bah! that does not amount to anything more than a mock-marriage."

"There were witnesses."

"Granted."

"They signed their names to the paper I drew up, as witnesses."

"Well?"

"I gave Miss Graydon the paper."

"All right, and she said she would keep it as a souvenir of her visit to Orangelands, and she tacked the card I shot through to it."

"Chatard, you are awfully dull, for you will not understand me."

"In heaven's name what more is there for me to understand?"

"I am a magistrate!"

The secret was out, and it brought the duelist to his feet with a spring.

His face grew as red as the wound on his forehead, barely yet healed.

Then his face paled, he uttered no word, but resumed his seat with the most perfect coolness, while, taking a cigar from the stand he lighted it.

The planter watched him.

He had set a trap for a tiger he knew, and had caught him.

"What would be the result?"

He had sown the wind, so might expect to reap a whirlwind.

He was surprised at the manner of the duelist.

At length, when the silence became painful, and Duncan Chatard calmly smoked away, the planter said:

"I have been a magistrate in the county for years, but was never called upon to do one act as such, so it was never thought of by any one."

"But I knew what I was doing, and I did it to save my child from you."

"Had Miss Graydon been a homely girl, and poor, I would not have done as I did; but I knew she was an heiress, she certainly is beautiful, her family irreproachable and her character is lovely."

"She will make you a good wife, Chatard, so go on and win her, tell her the situation if necessary, but not otherwise, I beg of you."

"A change will do you good, and you will get away from those dreadful meetings on the field of honor."

"Go, Duncan, and marry her as soon as you have won her, for you can do so I know, as, but for the awe they feel of you as a duelist, all the women would love you."

Still no word from the duelist, who calmly smoked on.

"You are angry with me, Chatard, and you have a right to be."

"Not in the slightest degree, my dear friend, for you have done me a great favor."

"You have pointed out a course to me which I shall follow to the letter, and I will not betray you unless I have to do so."

"But I go to win, and only the lady in question could atone for losing your lovely daughter."

"But I must hold you to your offer, that you would serve me, and claim you as my second in this duel with Sheldon."

"It was only my expected father-in-law that I wished to keep out of the affair."

"Now it makes no difference, so pray get ready to accompany me, and give Miss Anita a run down to the city too."

"Pray do, my good Chatard, for it may be a long time ere I see you again, for I start for Virginia, you know, at an early day."

"Here, by the way, destroy these notes, for I release you of the debt you owe me in return for the great service done me in that supposed mock marriage."

"Your hand, my dear friend, that we may be as before."

Pierre Bernard was bewildered. He did not know just how to take the duelist; but he grasped his hand, called to Anita to prepare to go to the city, which she did with a haste that showed her expected pleasure in the trip, and an hour after the three, with the maid and valet of the maiden and the planter, took the steamer down to New Orleans.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE LEGACY.

It was long after midnight, when the party from Orangelands arrived in New Orleans.

The planter and his daughter were driven to the hotel, while the duelist went to his home, promising to take a late breakfast with them, as they urged it.

Entering his luxurious rooms, which were ever ready for his coming, the duelist went to his desk, unlocked a secret drawer and took out a paper that was yellow with age.

It was written in a bold hand and dated years before:

It was as follows:

"CHATEAU CHATARD,
Nov. 1st, 18—."

"TO MY SON:—

"Young as you now are, Duncan, I address you these lines, the last that may ever come from my pen."

"You know something of the vendetta that has existed between the Sheldons and the Chatards?"

"It has cost valuable lives, it may cost more; but it is not for the Chatards to yield."

"To-morrow at sunrise I go to meet in a duel Doctor Luke Sheldon."

"He has two sons and a daughter, while I have but one child, yourself."

"If he falls by my hand, I shall expect his sons to avenge him when they grow older, by calling me out."

"If I fall by his hand, I shall expect you to avenge me by calling my slayer to account."

"So it has gone on for years, and this is the real legacy I leave to you, one of hate, for my wealth comes to you from beyond me, my father, and his father before me."

"Do not seek a quarrel until you are of age."

"Then be prepared to avenge me if I fall."

"If you marry and have sons, hand down this vendetta as a legacy."

"You are cool-headed, full of nerve and intelligent beyond your years."

"Take my advice and keep up your pistol and sword practice as regularly as you say your prayers."

"Do not cease until you are sure no man can disarm or touch you with a sword-point, and keep up your pistol practice until you can send every bullet into the bull's-eye in fifty shots."

"Do not give up when you accomplish this, for you at once get out of practice, and a duelist should keep his hand in constantly."

"Never show by your face what your brain has in it, or your heart feels."

"Learn to smile if you are suffering agony untold, of mind or body, for a grimace does not ease pain, nor does a cry relieve it."

"Fight Fate always, make friends, but wholly trust no man or woman."

"Shun a coward as you would a mad dog, for they are more dangerous."

"Let no woman rule you, for they are like wine, they make fools of men by exciting the brain."

"Be merciless to an armed foe, be merciful to a fallen one."

"In a few hours more you will be called upon to mourn my death, or to welcome me as one who has sent a bitter foe to the grave."

"I do not dread death, nor do I love life, so should it be with you, my son."

"Now, if it is to be death, I say farewell, leaving you this, my legacy of hate."

"If I live, then I can tell you what I have written here."

"I take you with me to the field, that your heart may be steeled for the future."

"Your loving father,

"DUNCAN CHATARD."

Such was the letter which Duncan Chatard read for the hundredth time.

He had gone to the field with his father, had seen him fall at the hand of Doctor Sheldon, and had returned home to receive the letter written him, and which old Toby handed to him.

That letter he treasured most highly, and he had tried to school himself according to its teachings.

Had the man who wrote it lived, he would have been proud of his son, for he was just the kind of man that loved such a son.

Having read the letter over Duncan Chatard returned it to his desk and then sought rest.

Sleep came to him at once.

If phantoms of the dead hovered about him, they did not disturb his slumbers.

If he felt their presence, he did not show it.

He had decided to rise at nine, and promptly at that hour he awoke.

He dressed leisurely, called for his carriage, and drove to the San Luis Hotel.

Mr. Bernard met him, and with Anita they went in to breakfast.

Never had Anita seen the duelist more entertaining.

She saw that the number in the breakfast-room all regarded him curiously.

Some with awe in their glance, others with pity, a few with something like repugnance.

Many bowed to him and then glanced at her.

What would they think, she wondered, if they knew he was to fight another duel that very day?

Presently two gentlemen entered, arm in arm.

They were Doctor Luke Sheldon and Octave Fairix.

The doctor was a well-preserved, handsome man of fifty odd, very courteous to all.

He did not recognize those at the table where sat the Bernard party, and the waiter knew not the gulf between them, so led them to the opposite side.

A hum ran through the room, and Anita, who knew the doctor by sight, and Octave Fairix quite well, turned pale.

But Duncan Chatard never changed color.

Not a muscle of his face moved, and bowing low, he said:

"Good-morning, gentlemen!"

Doctor Sheldon and Fairix had discovered too late who it was they were to confront.

To change would make it marked, and so they bowed to the duelist, and then to the planter and Anita.

A silence to follow would have been awkward; but Duncan Chatard turned to Anita and made some pleasant remark, and she was at her ease again, and the doctor and Fairix entered into conversation.

Soon after the Chatard party arose and departed, and the verdict of all in the room was that the duelist had mastered the situation.

He certainly had followed his father's teachings, for he had shown no surprise whatever at the *contretemps*.

Had those in the room but known that a duel between Sheldon and Chatard was already arranged they would have wondered the more.

The next morning they called the circumstance of the meeting at the breakfast table most vividly to mind.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PLEDGE.

"THE changes are about even, Miss Irene, and to be honest with you, perhaps with a shadow against life."

So said Doctor Barry to Irene Sheldon one morning after his visit to the wounded soldier.

Rupert Sheldon was improving steadily, was told by the doctor that he could leave his room, and with his arm in a sling had gone to seek his sister, while the physician went to see Claude Scofield.

The young soldier did indeed seem to hover between life and death.

The chances seemed rather against him, and so the doctor had sought Irene to tell her what he did.

The mother and sister of Claude Scofield were guests of Mrs. Girard, having come down from Bay St. Louis to be near the sufferer, and they divided watches with Irene, who was all devotion to her wounded lover.

Doctor Sheldon had also come down from the Bay, and those who knew him best thought that he had other objects in view than to visit his son and the soldier, though of course he showed that his first duty was to them.

He declined his sister's invitation to make his stay at her home, for Mrs. Girard's mansion was large enough to entertain a score of guests, and took up his abode at the hotel.

The doctor met Irene just as her brother had found her, and the three had entered the parlor together.

Irene heard without a word, and the physician departed.

Then she turned to her brother:

"You wished to see me, Rupert?"

"Yes, sis," and Rupert seemed a trifle confused.

She led the way to a side veranda, and they sat down together.

"What is it, brother, for you seem worried?"

"I didn't meet your expectations, Irene, did I?"

"Ah, Rupert, is that all?"

"It's enough."

"Why, don't give it a thought, for you did your best."

"I know it; but I had the devil to fight, sis."

"I believed that no man was your equal, Rupert."

"He is my superior."

"So it proved; but I thought you could do as you pleased in a sword combat with him, and so I sought your aid, thinking all would be well."

"Sister Irene, if I was a gambler, I would have staked my entire inheritance that I could disarm or kill any man with a sword, or fire quicker and truer with a pistol."

"It has been my study for years and yet that calm-faced duelist handled me easily."

"I felt I had my match when our swords crossed, I knew I had my superior when a minute had gone by."

"He did not seek to kill me, for he could have done so."

"He spared my life, and that puts me out of the game."

"You must not meet again."

"No, I cannot, unless he makes the break, and I wish he would, for I would like to see if he is as good a pistol-shot as he is a hand with the sword."

"What better proof do you wish than Captain Scofield's present condition?"

"That's so! I'd forgotten that, for he did fire for dead center and the locket alone saved him; but Scofield proved himself a good one, too."

"Both guns went off together, to wound each as they did," and Rupert's interest in the affair was very evident.

Then he said, as Irene remained silent:

"Sister, I have something to say to you."

"Yes."

"You are engaged to Scofield?"

"Yes."

"You were to be married next month?"

"We were."

"Now, Claude has begun to wilt; that is, he is not so sure of living, and this morning when I saw him, he wished me to see you and urge that you would marry him now."

"Rupert."

"I know it's not the fashion, sis, to marry a man who is playing a game for life and death, but he wishes to leave you his name and his for-

tune, he said, and the Lord knows if it will please him you might agree."

"I will think of it, brother."

"All right, sis, and father intends to see you about it, and urge it too, as I do."

Rupert then left, and Doctor Sheldon soon after found her still on the veranda.

"My child, I am glad to find you alone, for I have come from Scofield just now."

"Is he worse, father?"

"Neither worse or better."

"He is perfectly conscious, but says little, and simply seems to be watching the pendulum of his life swinging back and forth and wondering when it will stop."

"It is pitiful to see that great, strong man, that splendid fellow, as helpless as a babe."

"It is indeed sad, sir; but I hope for his recovery."

"A couple of days will tell."

"I see that you have little hope."

"I fear the worst, my child; but, if he gets well, I hope it will be so that he never meets that man again."

"Mr. Chatard?"

"Yes, Duncan Chatard."

"Would it be possible?"

"Yes, in his case, but not with Rupert, for from some strange motive the fellow gave your brother his life."

"It was remorse I suppose that prompted it; but at any rate he could not fight Rupert again without other provocation."

"But Captain Scofield he could?"

"Yes, they are quits."

"Quits?"

"That is, they both shot to kill and both came very near it."

"Scofield's aim was deadly, but the fellow's hard skull flattened the bullet."

"His aim was as true, but a locket Scofield wore, yours doubtless, glanced the bullet out of the line into his breast."

"Now, if Scofield recovers, he will surely meet Chatard again, unless something can be done to prevent."

"What can be done, father?"

"I have not thought it out clearly yet; but I soon will," said Doctor Sheldon in a manner of deep meditation.

"Now, my child, Scofield wishes me to urge you to marry him, for he wishes you to be his widow if he dies."

"Can we not wait, sir?"

"Hardly, for he may pass into a comatose state at any time, and from that to death."

"Now, though he can speak but little, he has his full faculties, and can go through the ceremony."

"Unconscious he could not, and if he becomes so, he will never rally."

"Go to him and say you will marry him, and I will send for the Reverend Kip to perform the ceremony."

"Leave me alone, father, and I will think it over."

"I feel that you will consent, my child, under the circumstances."

Alone, Irene looked the picture of woe.

A long while this expression of anguish rested upon her face, and then she said:

"I do not love him, as I should; but how can I when I love that man."

"He accepted the love I gave him, as it was, and so I should be content."

"He may die, and then, with that man my husband's murderer, may it not teach me to hate him?"

"It is a lesson I should learn, willingly learn, for what is he but poor brother Bennett's slayer?"

"And that miniature?"

"Who is she?"

"Helene! I never heard him speak of her, and yet he wore it next his heart, and has for a long time."

"And Helene saved his life, if he lives."

"I cannot ask him now about it."

"Why should I?"

"I have my secret, and it is a secret love, so why should I not allow him his secret love, for there is a mystery about this Helene."

"He asked for the miniature, and Lize came to me for it, so I gave it up, telling her not to let him know I had seen it."

"She says he asked her to put it under his pillow and she did."

"And he, dying maybe, would marry me with Helene's picture near him?"

"Would not I do the same if I had—Bah! I must not compare notes."

"I will marry him."

With this Irene Sheldon arose and sought the room of the wounded man.

She walked up to the bed, placed her hand on his and said in a distinct voice:

"Claude, I will become your wife to-morrow, to-day as you have asked it."

The smile that crossed his face was her reward.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OFF TO THE FIELD.

THE wounded soldier seemed to improve, from the moment that Irene Sheldon said that she would then and there become his wife.

It was decided that they should be married on the morrow, and the next day the doctor said that his patient could go through the ceremony.

The Reverend Kip was sent for, the father, brother and aunt of the bride were present, with the mother and sister of the wounded man, and Octave Fairix as a witness, he who had been the second of Bennett Sheldon in his fatal duel with Chatard.

Irene was plainly dressed, and went up to the bed placing her hand in that of her lover.

The engagement ring which he had given her served double duty as a wedding also, and the minister went through the service in a voice that seemed sepulchral enough for a funeral.

Doctor Sheldon gave the bride away, Octave Fairix signed as a witness, and Irene, who loved Chatard the duelist became the wife of Claude Scofield, who had near him the miniature, of the unknown and mysterious Helene which had saved him from instant death on the field of honor.

There was something weird in the ceremony, and old Lize shook her head and muttered to herself in an uncanny way as she looked on.

Doctor Sheldon seemed strangely pleased after the ceremony.

He kissed his daughter with unusual warmth, grasped the hand of his newly-made son-in-law and then left the room with Octave Fairix.

"Now, Fairix, Rupert is out of the way of a fight with Chatard, in one sense of the word; but I feel that if the duelist lives an affair is certain between them, and that means my boy's death."

"Irene is happy, or will be if Scofield lives, and I feel sure that he will."

"But if so a meeting with Chatard is assured, for he is now on the side of the Sheldons and hence a victim of the vendetta if it must be."

"There are no more Chatards than the duelist, to carry on this feud, and so it is best that he be removed."

"I removed his father, you remember, he killed my son Bennett, wounded Rupert, and from his hand Scofield now lies near death, so the odds are in favor of Chatard."

"His death will even them, and so, my dear Fairix, I place myself in your hands to have me kill Chatard."

"But, doctor, you know what a dangerous fellow this man is?"

"True; but I have not neglected my proper practice, and am a better shot to-day than ever, and also a better swordsman."

"I am not an old man, just over fifty, and if in the army they would not excuse me from battle if I was seventy."

"I must meet him, Fairix, and so you go up to Orangelands Plantation, the home of Pierre Bernard, you know, where he is visiting, and tell him I demand a meeting."

"I wish you would weigh well this matter, Doctor Sheldon."

"I have."

"Your death now might give Scofield a setback that would prove fatal."

"True, but Chatard's death might help him along, you see."

Octave Fairix shook his head.

"By to-morrow Scofield will either change for the worse, or the better."

"You see Chatard to-morrow, and so it will be several days before the meeting, and the crisis with Scofield will have passed."

"If I should fall, why then no one need tell Scofield until he is safe, and if Chatard goes under, why I'll give him an account of the affair that will be far better than medicine to him."

"I am but half-convinced."

"If you really feel you do not care to act, Fairix, why—"

"You misunderstand me, doctor."

"I urge against a meeting, for I know what a man you are to face."

"I must take my chances, my friend."

Octave Fairix sighed; but he accepted the responsibility put upon him, and two days after made his visit to Orangelands which the reader already knows about.

That same morning the papers had the notice of the marriage of Irene and Claude Scofield, and Duncan Chatard knew that revenge was all that remained for him then—the woman he loved had slipped away from him, either by intention, or from influence she could not resist.

As the wife of another man, Irene Sheldon was nothing to Duncan Chatard.

If she could wound him by marrying Scofield, then he had the power to wound her, and would.

Such were his thoughts when he drove by the hotel in the afternoon for Pierre Bernard to go with him to the scene of the duel.

He was ushered into the Bernards' private parlor, and he saw that Anita was deeply moved.

His air of utter indifference appalled her, and as she grasped his hand in farewell, she said:

"Heaven bless and preserve you."

"Heaven may not bless, but your sweet prayer may preserve me, Miss Anita—at least a prayer from your lips shall be a good omen to

me," he said with a pleasant smile, and turning to her father added:

"Come, planter, you know my habit to be first on the field; we must not be late."

The next moment they were gone, and Anita threw herself down upon her knees by the sofa and went into tears.

She was becoming strangely fond of this man, so much her senior, so much to be dreaded by his foes.

Was it love, friendship or fascination she felt for Chatard the duelist?

The sequel will have to reveal which.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE VENDETTA.

THE spot intended for the duel between Doctor Sheldon and Duncan Chatard, was at a point on the river, now in the limits of New Orleans and known as Carrollton.

There was a pretty grove of live oaks, a picturesque spot, where the laughter of picnickers was often heard, the crack of a pistol seldom.

It was secluded, and at the hour of sunset no one would be found there, unless there had been some festive gathering upon the grounds during the day. The carriage of Doctor Sheldon came from the mansion of Madam Girard.

He had gone there to take a last look of those dear to him.

Not one suspected the errand he was going upon.

He and Fairix had lunch at the mansion, and he was never so gay.

He chatted pleasantly with Captain Scofield, whom Doctor Barry pronounced decidedly out of danger, and added that he intended to prescribe marrying for young people when critically ill in future.

"We have an engagement, you remember, doctor," said Fairix.

"Can I go with you, father, for a drive?" asked Irene.

"No, my child, for we are to meet some gentlemen."

"Then I can go," Rupert said.

"No, my son, for this happens to be a little invitation affair of Octave's getting up."

"Come, good-by," and the doctor kissed his sister and daughter, clasped his son's hand, and was gone.

The carriage rolled away, and neither spoke.

At last, as the vehicle turned into the green lane running between two houses down to the live-oak grove, Octave Fairix grew a little anxious about his friend, and said:

"We should not have gone to Madam Girard's."

The doctor laughed.

"Ah! I see that you think I was unnerved."

"It is not so, Fairix, for my nerves are as firm as iron."

"This is my third affair of the kind, for I shot a brother officer once on the frontier, who forced a difficulty upon me, and killed the father of the man I am now going to kill."

"The man who has been in one duel knows what to expect, as does he who has taken one life."

"The strain of parting comes in the first affair."

"After that the man who carries a human life in his heart can face anything with nerve."

"See, I am as cool as though we were on our way to meet a friend, instead of my foe."

Octave Fairix was reassured.

The doctor's face had color in it, and, but for the hateful glitter in the eyes, he looked perfectly serene.

The carriage rolled swiftly into the grove, and there was one there before it.

It was Duncan Chatard and his second, and they stood together beneath a tree, both with cigars between their teeth.

Upon the arrival of Doctor Sheldon and Octave Fairix, Duncan Chatard raised his hat with marked politeness.

He cast a quick, searching glance at the man who had slain his father, and whom he had come there to meet, seemingly taking his measure in that one look.

The seconds walked apart, the foot-men brought the weapons from the carriages and laid them upon the ground, and the two principals stood apart alone.

If the duelist had bitter thoughts he did not show them.

His face certainly revealed nothing, neither hate, hope or fear.

The doctor on the contrary was angered in the presence of his foe, and his flushed face and burning eyes showed as much.

The seconds soon agreed upon all to the satisfaction of each, and the pistols were taken from their cases and loaded:

The duelists took their stands, the pistols were placed in their hands and the command to fire was won by Octave Fairix.

"Gentlemen, I shall give the orders as follows:

"Ready, fire! One, two, three!"

"The shots must be delivered on the word two—if before, or after the man who so fires can be shot down by the second of his adversary."

"This is as Mr. Chatard desires the affair to be conducted."

"Are you content?"

Both bowed.

Then came the ominous words:

"Ready! fire! one—two—"

The reports of the pistols drowned the word. One pistol exploded half a second before the other.

It was the one that gave the death-shot, for the trigger of the other was pulled by the death-clutch of the finger.

One man had sunk without a moan in his tracks.

The other had tossed his pistol upon the ground and turned away.

"Duncan, you have killed him."

"I know it, for I sent my bullet through the center of the forehead," was the calm reply.

"My God! how sad!" said Pierre Bernard.

"Very sad; but my father is avenged," and then the duelist said:

"Perhaps it would be well for you to suggest that Fairix go on ahead to break the news at Madam Girard's—it will be a great shock, you know."

"I will," and the planter returned to the side of the dead man, where were Octave Fairix and the groom.

A few words of sympathy from Pierre Bernard to Octave Fairix, and the planter and the duelist drove back to the city in the gathering gloom of night.

"Remember, you and your daughter are to dine with me at my house to-night."

"I so directed my butler," said the duelist as they walked up to the hotel.

"I will at once go up and fetch Anita," was the reply of the planter, who was utterly amazed at the coolness of the duelist.

Soon after Anita came down with her father and entered the carriage.

She offered her hand in silence, for her father had told her hastily all that had occurred, and after a short drive they drove into the grounds of the duelist's home.

A pleasant host he made that evening, and as he escorted Anita to the carriage, he said:

"If you have any message for your friend, Miss Graydon, I will be glad to be the bearer of them, for I leave for Virginia to-morrow night."

"You are going to Virginia, and will see Eleanor?" said Anita, with surprise.

"Yes, I hope to see her before long; but I will see you to-morrow, so will only say good-night now, and the carriage rolled away, leaving the duelist alone to his own bitter reveries."

CHAPTER XXVI.

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

THE heart of Octave Fairix was full to overflowing as he stopped the carriage at the stables and went on foot to the front of the mansion.

Rupert Sheldon was seated upon the piazza smoking his after-dinner cigar and nursing his wounded arm, which was still painful.

He looked up as Fairix approached and rose quickly.

"Fairix, where is my father?"

There was suspicion in the words, and as Fairix did not answer promptly, he continued:

"A thought came into my mind of evil when you and my father had gone, and I sprung on a horse and rode to the dueling-ground, weak as I am."

"But not finding you there as I feared, I returned."

"Now, what is it, my dear Fairix?"

"Rupert, your father challenged Chatard."

"I feared it; but when is it to come off?"

"Alas! it is over."

"That man lives?"

"Yes."

"Unhurt?"

"Yes."

"And my father was killed?"

"Yes."

"You were his second?"

"I was."

"Then all was fair, I know; but, great God! how terrible this is."

The son turned away for a moment.

It was with a great effort he mastered himself.

Then he said:

"Where is he?"

"The body is in the carriage at the stables."

"I came on to break the news."

"Ever kind."

"Remain here, please, and I will call my aunt out, and then we must break the news to poor sister, for it will go hard with her, and, Fairix, Scofield must not know of this for days, as the shock might prove fatal to him."

"Yes; but call your aunt, and then we will see what she says."

Madam Girard was sent for to come upon the piazza.

She was a woman as stately as a queen, and with wonderful courage.

She had been reared to understand all about the vendetta of the Sheldons and Chatards, and she had had to mourn for those slain, so she expected at any moment an affair might come off

between her foes and those she loved, according to the "code of honor."

She came out upon the piazza, and saw who were there.

Her nephews and Octave Fairix arose, and the former met her as she advanced.

"Aunt, I sent for you, for I know your courage in a time when it is needed."

"Mr. Fairix brings us bad, true news, the worst that he could be the bearer of."

"Your father?"

The words were calmly uttered; but they cost an effort which the darkness concealed.

"Is dead."

"Killed by Chatard?"

"Yes, aunt."

"And he?"

"Is unhurt."

"Save by the remorse that must enter deep into his guilty soul," came the words, almost savagely uttered.

"It was a duel, of course?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Mr. Fairix, you were my brother's second, I infer?"

"Yes, madam."

"Then he was in good hands; but this death-roll has been a long one, and now leaves one Chatard and one Sheldon."

"Yes, aunt, the vendetta must end soon for want of material," grimly said Rupert Sheldon.

"I recall as many as seven Sheldons and six Chatards who have been killed, so they lead us by one."

"But my heart's bitterness must not let me forget the dead."

"You have brought the body to my house, Mr. Fairix?"

"I have."

"Have it brought into the house, Rupert, and placed in the chamber in the east wing, while I go to your sister, for I fear the effects upon her."

"I am here, aunt."

"I have heard all."

The words were touchingly sorrowful, and Irene glided out upon the piazza.

She had been seated in the library by the window and had heard all.

She did not cry out, for her grief was too great.

Then she too had been schooled to expect anything, and of late she had been schooling herself to bear all sorrow and suffering.

Her father, her noble, splendid father, whom she had so dearly loved, had been killed, and more, the hand of the man whom she loved had done the deed.

He had been merciful to her brother; but when he knew her as a wife, then to her father he had been merciless.

He was revengeful, and where would that revenge stop?

Her brother yet lived, and so did her husband.

Which would the Nemesis strike next, for surely, if he struck at the life of her father, he would not hesitate at others dear to her.

Such were her thoughts, as she came out upon the piazza.

She was calm, perfectly so, and she felt that she must so remain, for there was a life that was much to her, now, her husband's, that a shock might kill.

Claude Scofield was improving rapidly; but a setback might prove fatal.

So in hushed voices they talked, the women as calm as the men, and then the mother and sister of the wounded soldier were let into the dread secret, and all were warned that he must know nothing, suspect nothing.

The body was borne to the chamber prepared for it, and the watchers came to do their sad work. Into the room where her husband lay went Irene.

Lize alone was with him, for no one had had the courage to go there bearing the secret in their hearts.

The soldier was improving, that was certain, for he smiled pleasantly and held out his hand.

"I was getting lonesome in spite of good Lize being here."

"It has been two hours since you left me."

"Yes, but I have been busy."

"Now you must not talk, and I have some dinner here for you, and I hope you will soon be able to enjoy something that is tempting."

"Will your father dine with you?"

"No, Claude."

"I thought he was to do so?"

"Father was called home."

"And has gone?"

"Yes."

"Something wholly unexpected called him, I suppose?"

"Yes, but you must not talk, or I will have to leave you to the tender mercies of Lize."

"I'll not say a word," and he smiled.

Then he said, breaking his word as all invalids do:

"How pale you are."

"You are confining yourself too closely."

She put her finger to her lips, then fed him as she would a child, and tottering to her own room threw herself down in an agony of grief upon her bed.

The next day the papers were full of the duel that had been fought, and there in the breakfast

room at the hotel, where the two men had been placed at the same table, vividly recalled every scene and walk of the day before.

"When will this cruel vendetta end?" one of the papers had asked.

And many asked the same question and wondered when?

To the burying-grounds of his family the body of Doctor Sheldon was borne, Rupert Sheldon and Octave Fairix accompanying the remains, and not a hint had Claude Scofield received of what had occurred.

It was just sunset when the grave was filled in and all turned away, all but one.

That one was Rupert Sheldon, and Fairix awaited in the family carriage for him, to drive back to Gulf View for the night.

"He has canceled the debt I owed him in sparing my life, for his hand has placed father and son side by side."

"Now, Duncan Chatard, it is war to the knife between us, for here I swear it!"

The left arm was raised toward Heaven as he uttered the words, and one knee was pressed to the damp earth between the graves of the two whom he vowed to avenge.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GRAYDON GRANGE.

AMONG the many old homes built in the early days of the Old Dominion, there was not one that was more attractive as a dwelling-place than Graydon Grange.

It was situated in one of the most delightful portions of the State of Virginia, and about it were mountains, hills, valleys and plains, with a winding river, bounding rivulets and all that go to make up woodland scenery.

The mansion was a very large one, with great comfortable rooms, piazzas, wide walls, and, in fact, an abode fit for a lord.

It was situated upon a hill, and there were cultivated flower gardens about it and a natural park that wandered away for miles.

In a valley that the piazzas of the mansion looked down upon were the quarters of the slaves, who were counted at a couple of hundred, and there was more land than these could cultivate.

Within doors Graydon Manor was a perfect home, and upon its walls hung the portraits of half a score of generations.

Such was the home of Eleanor Graydon, the schoolmate of Anita Bernard, and the one whom Planter Bernard had legally married to the duelist, thus, as he hoped, preventing a union between Duncan Chatard and his daughter.

The dwellers at Graydon Grange, at the time this story opens, were four in number, Colonel Graydon and his three children, Gardner, Gaston and Eleanor.

The colonel had been a distinguished officer of the army, and was a sufferer from a severe wound received in a duel with the father of Harold Argyle, so that he was confined to his house most of the time.

Gardner Graydon had been a wild fellow from his boyhood, and to keep the family reputation, as his father was deburred from dueling since his duel with Archer Argyle, he had called that gentleman out the day he was twenty-one and had killed him.

He was a dead shot, a wild rider across country, followed the hounds where few dared ride, and drank deeply.

His nature was reckless, his bearing haughty, and few liked him, where all feared him, for he had shown his temper in many ways, and when drinking was as dangerous as a jungle tiger.

His redeeming trait was his love for his beautiful sister.

She alone could manage him, and he was obedient to her slightest wish.

But Eleanor could not remain at home always, and when she was at boarding-school, the tiger was unchained.

He fretted when she went home with Anita Bernard for a visit, instead of coming directly home from school, and when she was expected, he went to meet her in a distant town.

After her return, Gardner Graydon seemed to be a changed man.

He was always sober, rode out daily with his sister, took more care of his general appearance, and seemed to live but in her smile.

Thus the weeks passed, and one day the young Virginian was in the village standing at the post-office, which was in a country store.

He was waiting to give some orders for the household, and was watching the postmaster making up the mail, for he stood where he could see him.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon a pile of letters just taken from the box.

Among them he recognized a name that was well known to him.

One letter was addressed to

"HAROLD A. ARGYLE, ESQ."

It was directed to a well-known university, and the writing was in a feminine hand.

It was a peculiar handwriting, one to see and remember.

The face of the Virginian turned livid.

"Boyd, let me see that letter?" he said.

"I cannot, Mr. Graydon, for it is against the law," and the postmaster stamped the letter with others and threw them into the mail-bag.

For an instant the Virginian looked as though he meant to spring over the slight barrier and seize the letter.

But he realized that he would do that which might send him to prison, and he knew that the postmaster had a grudge against him of long standing, and would press it if he got the chance.

So he said quietly:

"It does not matter, only the writing struck me as peculiar."

"I did not observe which letter you referred to among them," was the reply, and the Virginian left the store without looking after the orders he had given.

Mounting his horse he rode straight home at a breakneck pace.

All knew his style of riding and gave way to him; but several remarked that he rode more furiously than ever and that his face was white, instead of being flushed with wine as was usually the case.

As he drew near home he slackened his pace and rode calmly up to the door.

"Where is my sister, Buck?" he said to the negro who met him at the door.

"She gone into de garding, Mars' Gardner."

To the garden he went, and there, in a vine-clad summer-house, perfumed with the scent of flowers, sat Eleanor Graydon.

Even more lovely she looked than when at Orangeland, and her dress though simple was of pure white and stylish, with a blue sash about the waist to set it off.

She hastily thrust something into her bosom as she heard his quick, firm step, and her face flushed as though guilty of something she wished unknown.

At a glance she saw that her brother was aroused.

Something had disturbed him, and she said:

"Why, brother, you are back soon?"

"I am, Eleanor, and it is to have a talk with you."

"Then sit down and tell me what it is."

"Eleanor, it is useless to ask you of a vendetta that existed between the family and the Argyles?"

"I know it but too well, Gardner," was the sad reply.

"May I ask upon which side your sympathies are?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you a true Graydon, or do you wish to be an Argyle?"

"I am a Graydon, brother."

"So uphold your kindred in all things?"

"In wrong doing, no."

"Do you not uphold this vendetta?"

"Ah no, for it is cruel and unjust, and ours was the side to start it, not from an honorable reason, but for revenge."

"I guess I was right, when I met you in Richmond."

"Right in what?"

"I thought that I recognized there one Harold Argyle, and yet I was not sure."

"It struck me that when I saw him he was with you; but I did not think it possible, so dismissed it."

"I remember that you went for a visit to Uncle Hunter and his wife soon after your return, and remained six weeks."

"Then you came home, and two weeks after you again went off for a week's visit to Norfolk."

"Now, Eleanor, why did you go to these places?"

"For the purpose you have named, to visit," was the reply.

Her face was very pale now, but her eyes flashed and her lips were firmly set.

"Very well; but tell me, were you not in town early this morning?"

"Yes."

"Who with?"

"I rode in alone."

"Why did you not ask me to go?"

"You were off on the plantation when I went."

"You mailed a letter there?"

She started and gazed fixedly at him.

"I mailed several."

"You mailed one in particular."

"I mailed all together; but, how do you know?"

"It matters not; but to whom were they addressed?"

"Brother, I am no longer a child, and I will not allow you even to interfere in what does not concern you, for my father does not."

He saw that she was at bay and he said:

"Bah! your father is little better than a child and knows nothing about what is going on."

"I tell you, Eleanor Graydon, you are a traitress to your name and I am sure that it was Harold Argyle I saw in Richmond, and that you have been away from home several times to see him."

"You wrote to him this morning, and I would have given much to have seen the letter, but if I took it, for I recognized your writing, that fool

Boyd would have sent me to prison for robbing the mails."

"But I saw the address and know where Argyle can be found, so you may be sure I will wring from him the truth if you will not tell it to me."

"I will tell you nothing."

"Then, by Heaven, he shall! and I start at daylight to catch the train," and wheeling on his heel, he walked swiftly away.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ELEANOR AT BAY.

HAD Eleanor Graydon have bent before the will of her angry, imperious brother, he would have triumphed.

She knew it but too well, so she showed a spirit that matched his own, and he did not cause her to flinch in the least.

But the moment he had gone, when she watched him leave the garden, she broke down. Her lips quivered, her eyes filled with tears, and she moaned forth:

"Ah, how will all this end?"

She sunk down upon the seat, and leaning her arms upon the rustic table in front of her, strewn with some fancy-work she had brought to the garden with her, she burst into tears.

"These hearts of ours rule us, for what has mine not done?" she said, at last.

But she was calm again now, and taking from her bosom a miniature she gazed long upon it, pressing her lips to the glass several times.

It was fastened about her neck with a gold chain, and worn out of sight, and thus it was that she had turned away when she heard her brother approaching.

Suddenly she sprung to her feet, a look of alarm upon her face.

"He is going to seek him, and—oh Heaven have mercy! What will the end be?"

"I must write him at once."

"The mail leaves town by the stage in an hour, and a letter to the driver will get him to mail it at the other end of his line, where he can put it on board the train."

"It will thus reach him half a day before Gardner gets there."

She hastened away from the arbor, entered the house and sought her room.

There she hastily wrote a note, one which the reader knows that Harold Argyle held in his hand when he was visited in his rooms by Gardner Graydon.

It was but a few lines, and sealing and addressing it, she inclosed it in a large envelope, and along with it a five-dollar note which she took from her purse.

Upon the outer envelope she wrote:

"Will the driver kindly mail the within on the train at the end of his line, and accept this bank-note for his services?"

"It is most important to have this mailed on time, and he will confer a favor by attending to it."

There was no signature, no address, only the above.

Then she slipped the letter into her pocket, threw on a sun hat and left the house.

She returned to the garden, but did not stop at the arbor.

Getting over the wall at the further end she walked rapidly along through the woods for half a mile.

Then she came to a stream and upon the banks of it was a *tepee*, or Indian wigwam.

A squaw sat by a fire cooking supper, a young girl and a youth were not far away, the former making a basket of reeds, and the latter engaged in making a trap in which to catch birds.

On a log near by, smoking a pipe, sat an Indian.

It was a remnant of a once mighty tribe, and they were allowed by Colonel Graydon to make their home on his estate.

From childhood Eleanor had ever been most kind to them, and they all loved her dearly, so greeted her coming with pleasure.

"Potomac, I wish this letter to go to town, to be handed to the stage-driver that drives to the railroad station."

"He leaves in just fifty minutes," and she looked at her watch, "and it is six miles to town."

"Will you take it for me, and get you something with this?"

She gave the chief a ten-dollar bill along with the letter.

"Potomac take it and glad."

"Do not say who gave it to you, and do not any of you tell I have been to your camp to-day."

"Injun no talk like fool," was the prompt response of Potomac.

"I know I can trust you—good-by."

She hastily left the camp, but she stopped upon a distant hill that commanded a view of the highway.

She had just halted when she saw Potomac dash by like the wind, mounted upon his staggly little pony.

Nor did the Indian slacken his pace until he reached the town.

He saw by the clock in the church steeple

that he had ten minutes to spare, if the time was right.

But the clock was an old one, and was frequently wrong, so had fooled him before.

"Great Spirit house tell heap lie sometime—make morning when it nighttime."

"Hope him not lie now," he muttered, and so urged his pony on.

The stage had not left the tavern, and the driver was standing near his horses.

"Here letter!"

The driver took the letter, read what was on the back, opened it, his eyes sparkling as he saw the bank-note, and he said:

"Say I'll do it; but who sent it?"

"Don't know," responded Potomac, following the example often set by the church clock of lying.

"All right; I'll go through on time, you bet, for this V comes in well."

"Will you put a drink under your buckskin belt, Injun?"

"No, make fool of Injun."

"Right you are, and of white man too."

"Time's up, day-day," and the driver sprung to his box and drove off, while Potomac made some purchases with his money and started back to his camp.

In the mean time Eleanor decided that she would take a ride on horseback to calm herself, for she was in a very excited mood.

"Mars' Gardner say no horse to leave the stable, missy," said the servant, whom she had sent for her horse.

"Where is Mr. Gardner?" she asked, while an angry flush came upon her face.

"He off on plantation somewhar, missy, and say he goin' way to night for few days."

"Bring my horse to the door, Sam."

"Missy 'Leonor, Massa Gardner done kill me ef I does."

"All right, Sam, I'll not get you into trouble," and Eleanor went down to her father's room.

"Father, Brother Gardner forbids the servants to let me have my horse."

"What does it mean?"

Colonel Graydon had the appearance of a man who lived a life of suffering.

He had been a fine-looking man in his younger years, but was but a wreck of his former self.

His will was under the control of his eldest son, and so he said:

"My child, your brother told me that he had a reason why no horse or slave should leave the plantation before to-morrow, except the one who drives him to town to-night, and he will be obeyed."

"I happen to have some property and rights of my own, father, and will not be controlled by brother Gardner's whims."

"I asked Netta Ashton to drive to town with me to-morrow, and now desire to let her know that I will not go, so I shall ride over and tell her so."

"Your brother will be furious."

"Let him be, for he is not my master, father."

"He will punish the servant who saddles your horse."

"I shall do it myself," and with this Eleanor threw her riding-skirt over her arm, kissed her father and walked out to the stables.

Sam was there, but she got her own saddle and bridle, took her horse out of his stall and soon had him ready for her ride.

Sam looked on in terror.

The idea of any one daring to disobey Master Graydon appalled him.

"Oh, Lordy!" he muttered, and Eleanor laughed.

Then she sprung into the saddle and rode off at a gallop.

Straight to Ashton Lodge she rode, three miles away, told Netta of her change of plans, and returned home at a gallop, for it was getting late.

As she neared the gate leading up to Graydon Grange, she met Potomac.

"Him say all right," said the Indian.

"I thank you, Potomac," and Eleanor rode right on without stopping, for she saw her brother just coming out of the gate.

"Ah! I was going to seek you," he said.

"Thank you, but I knew I should get home by dark."

"Where have you been, Eleanor?"

"To Ashton Lodge."

"Who saddled and bridled your horse for you?"

"I did."

"I left orders that no horse or any one was to leave the place."

"You can order as you please your own horses, Gardner, but I own this one, and I am not one of your slaves."

"To save Sam from punishment I saddled Fox myself, so I am the one to blame if blame there is."

Gardner Graydon knew of his sister's engagement for the morrow, and as he felt sure that she had no way to send a letter of warning ahead of him, and that one left at Ashton Lodge would not go for twenty-four hours, he said:

"Well, I had my reasons for my orders, sister, and am sorry you disobeyed them; but never mind, now."

"But I do mind, Gardner, and you might as well now understand that I am not subject to your orders."

"All else may fear you, but I do not, and if we expect to live together in peace, you must not attempt to drive me."

"Well we will see what is best when I return from my trip."

"Where are you going?"

"To see one Harold Argyle."

"For what purpose?"

"To learn that which you will not tell me."

"Brother, beware, and do not meddle in what does not concern you."

The man was cowed.

He had met a nature stronger than his own, and he remained silent for awhile, and then changed the subject as they rode on up the avenue together.

But before dawn he left home to catch the stage to the railroad station, and the result of that visit is already known.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A VISITOR AT GRAYDON GRANGE.

GASTON GRAYDON was away from home at the time of his brother's departure to wring from Harold Argyle the secret which his sister would not tell him.

He was undeniably a handsome young man, twenty-four years of age, and, like his brother, an athlete and hard rider, fond of sport and adventure.

But his nature was different altogether.

He was thoughtful, had been a hard student at college and was a genuine favorite.

He loved his father, was devotedly attached to his wild brother, though he often lectured him upon his ways, and thought no lovelier girl lived than Eleanor.

He had been visiting a friend in another part of the country, and was on his way home when he happened to pass through the town where the tragedy occurred that ended in his brother's death.

Instantly he went to the scene, started the wheels of the law in motion, to punish the murderer, as Harold Argyle was said to be, and then left for home with the body of his brother.

The burial took place the day of his arrival, and until after it was over he had had no chance to speak to his father or sister about the sad affair.

He simply had the facts that his brother had gone to the rooms of Harold Argyle, from some motive unknown to him, and that the student had killed him.

When the funeral cortege filed away from the secluded little burying-ground of the Graydons, Gaston had remained behind to make a vow, which was a rule among those of his blood, to kill the slayer of one of his name.

That vow he had made, and then he had returned home and sought his father.

Colonel Graydon was suffering too much from the shock, in his invalid state, to have anything to say, so Gaston had gone in search of his sister.

Eleanor was in the garden, in the very arbor where she and her brother had had the first unkind words that had ever passed between them.

She was seated before the table, her elbows resting upon it and her hands clasped tightly.

Her face showed that she suffered greatly, but she was strangely calm.

"Eleanor, I have come to have a talk with you."

His words were kind, and Eleanor wondered what he knew of the truth.

"Yes, Gaston."

"It was fortunate that I happened in town the day poor Gardner was murdered—"

"Murdered?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Of course, as is every one else."

"He went to the rooms of Mr. Argyle."

"That is what puzzles me."

"Why was he there?"

Eleanor saw that he did not know; but then, Harold Argyle was a prisoner, and all must come out.

She would tell as much as Gardner had known.

"Gaston, brother Gardner came here to this arbor the day before he left home and said that he was going to see Mr. Argyle and force from him the truth as to whether he knew me or not."

"Knew you?"

"Yes; and had brother asked me differently, I would have told him that which I will now tell you."

"You remember I told you of the burning of the Mississippi steamer on which I took passage from Orangelands?"

"Yes."

"I told you that my life, and the lives of others, was saved by a young man whose name I did not then know, and that when I got upon the other steamer he was not there."

"I remember."

"I did not tell you, however, that I afterward met him upon the train and traveled as far as Richmond with him."

"Then I believed his name was Harold Archer, but I afterward knew it to be Harold Archer Argyle."

"Great God! you owe your life to an Argyle?" and Gaston sprung to his feet.

"I do, and brother Gardner flew into a temper, rushed off to see Argyle, suspecting I know not what, and you know the result."

Gaston Graydon paced to and fro in silence.

His brow was contracted, his teeth set.

"Eleanor, what is there between you and Argyle?"

She made no reply.

"Will you not tell me?"

"I will not say anything one way or the other."

"Sister, I am sorry for this."

"All that there is must come out at the trial, and I will go to town and push that trial against Argyle to the bitter end."

"If he is guilty of murder, as all now appears to show him, he will end his life on the gallows."

"If he is cleared by a jury, then my vow is registered to take his life."

"He saved mine."

"Better that you had died, I fear; but we will not discuss the matter more."

"You withhold your confidence from me, and the courts will make all clear, while I will push Argyle up the gallows steps, mark my words."

"Now let us drop the matter, for we will not quarrel, sister mine, come what may."

She put her arms around his neck and kissed him, and thus a truce was made between them.

But the next day Gaston Graydon started for town to prosecute to the full extent of the law the man who had slain his brother.

In the neighborhood of Graydon Grange there was a feeling of relief at the taking off of Gardner Graydon, and the respect all felt for the rest of the family alone, prevented many from expressing their satisfaction that he was dead.

The neighborhood breathed more freely, and the negroes on the plantation said many a silent prayer.

"Bress de Lor' for his marcy!" though they had a wink of rejoicing in one eye to even up the forced tear in the other.

The suit was pressed hard against the prisoner, when the trial began, but nothing was elicited as to the immediate cause of the quarrel, or who had been the person under dispute, or who was the original of the mysterious portrait.

A few days after the sentence of the prisoner, a carriage drove up to Graydon Grange.

It was a traveling carriage, drawn by two stylish horses, and with a negro coachman and footman upon the box.

A gentleman alighted from the vehicle and handed his card to the sable butler, asking that it be handed to Miss Graydon.

On the card was the name:

"DUNCAN CHATARD,

NEW ORLEANS,

La."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TIDINGS AT GRAYDON GRANGE.

TWO days after the sentence of Harold Argyle, Gaston Graydon returned home.

There was no look of triumph in his eye, at the fate of his hereditary foe, and he met his sister with the air of one who wished to avoid talking upon the subject of the trial.

"Well, my son, what news have you?" asked Colonel Graydon, eagerly.

Eleanor was there, and looked, but asked no question.

"The trial is over, sir."

"Well, the result?"

"He was found guilty."

"We all know that; but the sentence?"

"He is to die upon the gallows."

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed the old man.

"When is he to be hanged?" asked Eleanor with perfect calmness.

"On the fifteenth of next month."

"Six weeks hence," the colonel said.

"Yes, sir."

"What was his defense?"

"That he was not guilty."

"Against all facts?"

"Yes, father."

"How did he stand his trial?"

"Like the brave man he certainly is."

"No brave man would murder another, my son; but he broke down when sentenced?"

"On the contrary, he never flinched, and I could not but admire him."

"Now that he has been sentenced Gardner will be avenged and as only old Mr. Argyle, now over seventy, alone remains of the family, our vendetta will end with the death of Harold Argyle."

"Yes, yes, and a red one it has been indeed."

"Ah, me! ah, me!"

Eleanor arose and left the room and soon after her brother found her pacing up and down the piazza in the moonlight.

He went up and slipping his arm in her's, said:

"Sister, it is all over."
 "Not yet."
 "What do you mean?"
 "The gallows is before him."
 "True."
 "He is in jail of course?"
 "Yes, there to remain until the day of his execution."
 "Did he make no statement, brother Gaston?"
 "Yes."
 "Will you tell what it was?"
 "He said that he was in his rooms, when a knock came at the door and Gardner entered.
 "He was surprised to see him, under the circumstances of the feud between our families, and asked why he had come."
 "In answer Gardner made certain charges—"
 "What were they?"
 "He refused to tell."
 "Ah!"
 "The Court threatened, but he was firm, and said that brother Gardner had attempted to unvail a portrait he had in his room; he sought to prevent, there was a struggle, and a pistol, which Gardner attempted to draw, went off and killed him."
 Eleanor uttered an exclamation, but checked words that rose to her lips.
 Then Gaston continued:
 "This is the way he says the affair occurred; but there is brother's dying accusation to refute it, and also he sought to escape after the deed."
 "But returned and gave himself up."
 "True."
 "When he might have escaped?"
 "Yes."
 "Why did he say he attempted to escape?"
 "Under the impulse of the moment."
 "And whose portrait was this that Gardner sought to see?"
 "I do not know, and nothing could make him tell."
 "Was it not there?"
 "No, for when he returned to the jail he bribed some one, no one could find out who, to go to his rooms, to which he gave them a pass-key, and take away the portrait and his desk, containing letters."
 "This act looked against him at the trial, but he was firm, and no one could find out who got the things, or what was done with them."
 "Brother Gaston, did you examine the clothes Gardner wore that day?"
 "Why?"
 "To see if there was a powder-burn on them, and to judge how, and from which direction the pistol had been fired."
 "Why, what a lawyer you would make."
 "Yes, our attorney said the pistol had been fired against the body, and looked as though it was held hard there."
 "Was there a powder-burn in the coat?"
 "No, in the vest."
 "Gardner always carried a pistol in a pocket in his vest, upon the left side."
 "He had his vest pocket made for it."
 "Yes, so he did."
 "Might he not have been drawing the weapon when it went off?"
 "It might, but the jury decided against that theory."
 "Juries have hanged many an innocent man, Gaston."
 "Why, El, you seem to be on the side against us."
 "Oh, no, I am on the side of justice; but whose pistol was it?"
 "Gardner's."
 "Only one shot fired?"
 "Yes."
 "And was Mr. Argyle armed?"
 "That no one knows except himself; but, sis, do you know that Gardner had a sweetheart?"
 "I do not."
 "It was suggested to me that this portrait that Argyle had in his room, might have been one of a girl Gardner loved; but then there were all kinds of rumors, suggestions and theories, and they were reduced to the fact that Gardner was killed in the rooms of Harold Argyle and with his last breath accused him of murdering him."
 "On that he was found guilty and is to hang."
 "Now what confession have you to make, sister mine?"
 "None."
 "You will not clear this matter up?"
 "I told you that Gardner in his frenzy, went to see Mr. Argyle to make accusations against him that were false, as I know, and so his death was upon his own head."
 "I cannot believe that the last of a race, who certainly have always been the soul of honor, could do a coward act."
 "But Gardner's dying words!"
 "Ah, Gaston, you know, as I do, that poor Gardner was full of venom, and if he could strike a foe with a dying word he would do so."
 "With you, I would know it to be as you said; but knowing that he was to die, Gardner, Heaven forgive me for saying so, knew he could get fearful revenge by sending Harold Argyle to the gallows."
 "Great God, Eleanor! your words fairly

startle me," and the young Virginian took several quick turns up and down the piazza.
 Then he returned to his sister and said earnestly:
 "Eleanor, you hold some secret that you will not confess, and I will not press it."
 "If I believed that the case might be as you have said, I would do all in my power to save Argyle from the gallows, if I had to call him out and shoot him in a duel the next day."
 "Let this matter drop between us, and in a few days I will return and personally, with the aid of a skilled detective, I will go over the entire facts, and if I see the slightest clew that Gardner was not killed by Argyle, I will myself go to the governor and ask for his pardon."
 "You are a noble fellow, Gaston," and the arms stole up around his neck and she drew his head down and kissed him.
 Then she slipped quietly away to her own room, took out her desk and sat down to write several letters.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TWO LETTERS.

THE first letter that Irene wrote was to Anita Bernard.

Since her talk with her brother, she felt better, and as she had written Anita the thrilling story of her adventure on the burning steamboat, she determined to let her know the sequel, so she wrote:

"GRAYDON GRANGE, ——— COUNTY, VIRGINIA, Nov. 10th, 19 —

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND:—Since I last wrote to you, I have had so much of trouble that I feel you will understand why your last letter had been neglected.

"Let me open my heart to you in the same old way we did when at the dear old academy together.

"I told you, Anita, of the fearful adventure on the steamboat, and how a handsome stranger, just such a hero as I had pictured the Knights of Old, came to my rescue, save my life, and did prodigies of valor, while he actually risked his life to get my baggage from the burning wreck.

"I told you also that he saw me on board an up-bound boat, and thus we parted; but I did not refer in my letters to having met him again.

"The truth is, there is a secret in the affair, but I will divulge a part of it to you, my dear friend.

"We did meet again, this handsome stranger and I, and it was in this way:

"I got on the train, when a gentleman offered me a seat.

"It was my hero.

"But his clothes were wrinkled, and he looked decidedly the worse for wear.

"But he had lost his baggage and his money, and had only his ticket and a few dollars to continue on his way home.

"I accepted the seat and, with hesitation he gave me his name as Harold Archer.

"He knew my name, and we became great friends.

"I accepted his offer as an escort, and, as we were detained a day in one place, I gave him my pocketbook to fit himself up with; but he said he had telegraphed for funds to meet him there, and so was handsomely supplied upon our arrival.

"Then when I saw him at dinner, he looked like another person.

"When we took the car again, a gentleman came up and warmly grasped his hand, while he said:

"My dear Harold Argyle, I am so glad to meet you again."

"That let out the secret, and he told me that his name was Harold Archer Argyle.

"I had recognized the name, and he told me why he had deceived me.

"Know, dear Anita, that he was the son of the Argyles, between whom and my family a vendetta has existed for generations, and through the bitter feud many lives have been lost upon either side.

"He dwells in Virginia with his grandfather, his father having been killed in a duel some years ago, by my oldest brother, Gardner, of whom you have so often heard me speak during our school-days.

"Well, Anita, he had saved my life, he was noble, brave, kind, and I had become deeply interested in him.

"He, knowing who I was, had taken a deep interest in me, so why should we not, if he was content, let the dead past bury its dead, and be friends?"

"We did become friends, warm, dear friends, and more I cannot tell you now.

"Well, at Richmond we parted; but we met again and again, in visits that I made to relatives and friends, and he painted my portrait, for he is a finished artist, and had an exquisite frame made for it; one that closed with lock and key.

"He was just finishing a course of law, which he took for his own pleasure, for he is very rich.

"But now comes the dark side of my story.

"My poor brother Gardner discovered that I knew Harold Argyle, and I would confess no more than I thought he should know, for I knew that he would seek trouble with him.

"This he did, going to his students' chambers at the university and striving to look at the portrait, mine, a struggle followed, a pistol exploded and my brother fell to the floor a dying man.

"And with his dying breath he accused Harold Argyle of being his murderer.

"At the trial it came out that Harold Argyle had bribed some one to remove the portrait and his desk, containing my letters, from his room, and so my name did not come up, I am happy to say.

"The portrait and desk he would not produce, and now he is in prison, condemned to die on the gallows.

"Could anything be more awful, my dear Anita?"

"If you knew all, you would say so; but, all I cannot tell you.

"That Harold Argyle killed my brother, only his own confession could make me believe.

"In six weeks he is to die, and so you see how I have suffered, and must suffer to the end."

Then followed more about Anita's home and her visit, and the letter was sealed and addressed.

Then a second letter was written.

It was dated, but bore no indication from whence it came, and it had no signature.

"It was as follows:

"Only your own words could make me believe you guilty as accused.

"The finding of the jury has no weight in my mind against you.

"I feel that you are innocent, no matter what the circumstantial evidence against you.

"The words you used one night of fearful danger to me, I now say to you.

"Have hope!"

This letter was written in a disguised hand, sealed and directed.

It was addressed to Harold Argyle.

The next day Eleanor visited the Indian camp and soon after Potomac mounted his shaggy pony and rode away.

He went to mail the letter to Harold Argyle in a town many miles distant from Graydon Grange.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT VALLEY VISTA.

VALLEY VISTA was the name of the Argyle Homestead, which was situated at the head of an extensive valley, and distant from Graydon Grange some thirty miles.

The homestead had been built by the great-grandfather of Harold Argyle, and each generation had added to its size and comforts until it was a home to be proud of.

No mansion in Virginia was finer, and few landowners could count more acres than could Archer Argyle, the aged owner of the estate at the time of which I write.

The neighbors were always glad of a chance to visit Valley Vista, and its good-cheer was noted far and wide.

But upon the mansion and its people had fallen a shadow, and it cast a deeper and deeper pall over each generation.

That shadow was the vendetta of the Argyles with the Graydons.

It dated far back, to a love-rivalry between the early settlers of each family, but it had come down as a heritage, and when dueling was fashionable in the grand old State of Virginia, each decade had found a victim cut off from one family or the other.

The cruel vendetta would not die out, and so it went on until it was brought near its close, for at last Gardner Graydon alone remained on the one side, for his father was a confined invalid, and old Archer Argyle was three score and ten, on the other side, for Harold the last of his race, as it were, was not to be taken into consideration, as he was in prison, under sentence of death upon the gallows.

Seated in a large and most luxuriously furnished room sat the master of Valley Vista.

His hair was as white as snow, his once erect form was bending with the weight of years, but his eyes were black and the fire in them had not yet died out.

He had just finished his dinner, and a servant had brought to the library a decanter of port, a cigar and his coffee.

Another had just come from the village with the mail.

The face of the old man was a noble one, refined and intelligent.

He was dressed with scrupulous care, and was just what he looked, a grand old gentleman of the ancient school.

The butler, who was a "study in black" of his master, placed the letters and papers upon the table, and then, with the familiarity of an old servitor waited near by.

"You wish to hear from Master Harold, Hector?" said the old gentleman ever polite to all.

"Yes, master, for I see there is a letter from him."

The spectacles were adjusted and the seal of the letter broken.

It was addressed in a bold hand and was from Harold Argyle.

The letter was dated in the prison, and Squire Argyle read it aloud, Hector listening with deep attention the while.

"When this meets your eyes my dear grandfather, read the letter, you will doubtless have heard that the trial went against me, that the verdict of the jury was that I am guilty."

"It was not a case of purchase it was simply the taking of a dying man's word against a living one's, and naturally the statement of the one about to face his Maker would have more weight with men than the word of a man trying to save himself from the gallows."

"I need not tell you, my grandfather, who know me so well, that I am not guilty."

"Circumstances were such as to point to my guilt, and I must suffer for it."

"I make no appeal, for it would end the same way."

"I am sentenced to die on the gallows, and though it is a death of ignominy, I will meet it."

"Before I die I will write you a confession, and I ask you to do as my last words request."

"I know that you will do so."

"When I am gone you are the last of our name."

and our grand old race will have gone; but it hurts me to the heart to be the one to end the line with an ignominious death.

"Still, in my innocence, I feel that you will believe."

"I write in haste now to tell you that I am not downcast over my fate, and to bid you cheer up."

"Soon I will write again."

"My love to the dear, faithful old servants at Valley Vista, and with every good wish for you, believe me to the last your dutiful and loving grandson,"

HAROLD ARGYLE."

The face of the old man who read these lines were as hard as steel, while Hector broke down, buried his white head upon the table, and sobbed like a child.

"Hector, my boy never did a wrong act, and they intend to murder him upon the dying words of a venomous man."

"I must save him, Hector, I must save him, if money and influence can do it."

"I will write at once to my lawyers to see if something besides law cannot save him."

The letters were written and sent the next day, and a gloom settled down upon Valley Vista, the servants seeming to feel the shadow that had fallen upon the house, and going about with silent tread and conversing in low tones.

As the days passed by the old master grew sterner and sterner, while his dark eyes burned brighter and brighter.

He went to his meals mechanically, and spent most of his time on horseback riding about his place.

The house seemed to be full of shadows to him and he longed to be out.

Letters came from the condemned heir but they told no more than had been said.

The lawyers wrote that nothing could be done, and as for rescue, as the old man had hinted at, a regiment could not accomplish it from that strong jail.

As for bribery, the authorities had taken good care to prevent that.

"So there is no hope—my boy must die upon the gallows, Hector," said the old master, as he turned to his faithful old butler who just then entered.

"Ah, master! I still hope, sah; but there is a lady to see you, sah."

"A lady?"

"Yes, sah, and she has just arrived in a traveling carriage."

"Do you know her?"

"No, sah."

"Nor the carriage?"

"No, sah."

"I must see her, Hector, so show her into the parlor, and get out my best coat," and the old master of Valley Vista hastened to his room to prepare to see his visitor.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A FAIR VISITOR.

THERE had driven up to the Valley Vista a stylish traveling carriage, drawn by two thoroughbred horses, and with coachman and footman on the box.

It had the appearance of having come some distance, for the horses showed that they had come a long way.

In the carriage was a lady, clad in a mourning suit and wearing a heavy veil.

It was this lady whom old Archer Argyle entered his parlor to see.

She did not hear his steps, so rapt she was in gazing upon a full length portrait that hung at one end of the parlor.

A good light shone upon it, and it represented a young man standing gun in hand, awaiting a covey of partridges to take wing that a pointer dog had just discovered.

The painting was a fine one, the sportsman's suit and all well portrayed; but the face was a finished piece of masterwork.

It was a face to see and remember ever—it was the face of Harold Argyle.

"Lady, you would see me?"

The old man spoke in a low tone, and bowed in a courtly way that betokened the perfect gentleman.

A slight exclamation came from the lips of the fair visitor to Valley Vista, and she started as though alarmed.

She was called back to herself and her surroundings by the voice of Archer Argyle.

"Ah, sir, I beg pardon; you are Mr. Argyle?" she said.

"Yes, Archer Argyle, lady, so tell me how I can serve you, and may I know who it is that I have the honor of attending?"

"Be seated, pray."

He took her hand and led her to a sofa, and saw that she was deeply moved.

"Sir, Mr. Argyle, do not misunderstand my visit to you when I say that I do not wish it to be known to any one."

"So anxious was I to hide my act, that I left home to visit relatives, and, at the town twenty miles from here took a carriage to drive to your home."

"You are fatigued then and need rest and refreshments."

"I will have your carriage put up, and you, lady, must accept my hospitality for a few hours at least."

There was something so gentle, so kind in the

manner and voice of the master of Valley Vista that the visitor said:

"You are so good to me; but let me tell you that one of my name should not accept hospitality beneath your roof."

"I am Miss Eleanor Graydon, Mr. Argyle, of Graydon Grange."

Mr. Argyle started, half drew away, but said quickly:

"The Argyle men, Miss Graydon, never make war or visit spite and hatred upon women."

"You have seen fit to visit my house and I welcome you."

The proud head of Eleanor Graydon was bowed at this, and she sobbed aloud.

When she looked up Mr. Argyle had gone, but he entered just then, bringing a glass of wine.

"Drink this, Miss Graydon, for it will help you."

She did as she was directed, and said:

"Your kindness unnerved me; but let me tell you, sir, that I came here to see if we could not, together, for a woman can do much when she sets her heart to it, save Harold Argyle from the cruel death to which he has been condemned."

"You, a Graydon, seeking to save my boy?"

"Why it was one of your name whose words put the noose about his neck," and the old gentleman spoke with some bitterness, which he in vain tried to subdue.

"It was my brother, my eldest brother, Gardner Graydon; but I do not believe that Harold Argyle killed my brother, or if so that it was a murder."

"I know your son, sir, and he may never have told you, but I owe to him my life."

"You?"

"Yes, sir, and I see that he has kept his noble courage and deeds a secret from even you, who would be so proud of them."

"Will you let me tell you all that I owe to Harold Argyle?"

"Gladly; but I believed that a Graydon could owe to those of my name only death."

"Ah, sir, it has been a cruel feud that has existed between your name and mine; but I will tell you my story, and then you will know why I came here to see if we could not, together, save him."

And Eleanor Graydon told the story of her meeting with Harold Argyle, and all that he had done for her and others on that awful night on the Mississippi.

That she had met him often since, she did not tell, for in that there was a mysterious secret, known only to herself and the man under sentence of death.

The old man listened with the deepest attention to all she said, and then he held forth his hand and said, in a low, quivering voice:

"Eleanor Graydon, whatever I may feel toward the men of your house, you I have friendship alone for."

"You are a noble, true woman, and I will shield your visit to me as I would act by my own daughter had I one, which, alas, I have not."

"No, I am an old man, looking down into my grave from my seventy-two years of life, and my idol lies in chains under the shadow of the gallows."

"But we must save him, for you give me new life."

"Now let me send old Nancy to conduct you to your room and a short rest will refresh you."

"Then I will have an early dinner, and you can drive back to town by night, for your horses will be rested, and in good condition for the road."

"You are Miss Eleanor to me, for I will not speak your name even before my faithful servants."

The old man rung the bell and sent for old Nancy, who at once led Eleanor to one of the most charming of guest-chambers.

She threw herself down on the bed for a rest, and when Nancy called her was surprised to find that she had been asleep over an hour.

She arose refreshed and hopeful, her visit had been so much better received than she had expected, and she sat down to dinner with a really good relish for the very sumptuous meal she had been treated to.

The host was almost cheerful and the dinner passed off pleasantly.

Then, at her master's request, Nancy showed his fair guest over the grand old mansion, and into Harold's room.

Here her heart was too full to speak, as she gazed upon the room which the heir to Valley Vista had occupied from boyhood.

Returning to the library the old man and the young girl put their heads together and began to plot some scheme to release the condemned prisoner.

Many plots were spoken of, and at last one was decided upon, the only one feasible, and that was to bribe the guards.

Whatever the consequences Harold Argyle must not die upon the gallows.

"I am only going to remain a few days with my relatives in town, Mr. Argyle, and while there will arrange with some one to carry out our plot, after which I return home."

"Remember, Miss Eleanor, I have a long purse, and you can draw to the end of it to save the boy."

"And I have ample funds of my own, sir; but to a girl's purse there is a limit, so I will call on you if I have to."

"I fear you know not how heavy a price you must pay, so I beg you to take this with you," and he went to his safe and took out a roll of bank-notes.

Soon after Eleanor took her leave, and Mr. Argyle told the coachman not to spare his horses going back to town.

"You must drive there in two hours," he said.

And the order was accompanied by a piece of gold, which decided the coachman to make the time required, for Eleanor wished to arrive before night, as she had only gone out to "spend the day with a friend," she had said to those she was visiting.

The coachman arrived on time, and Eleanor reached her cousin's home to find no anxiety was felt about her.

The next day a special detective was hired to see what he could do toward cheating the law he served, and two days after Eleanor returned home with hope in her heart.

It was the day after her return that Duncan Chatard, the duelist, arrived at Graydon Grange.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DUELIST'S QUEST.

WHEN Eleanor read the card brought to her by her maid, Gypsy, she gave a little cry of joy.

"Mr. Chatard! Why, how glad I am!"

So she said, and she began to make her toilet to go down and see him, while across her mind came the thought that he was one who would help her in her troubles.

"He is so brave, so kind, and I know he will help me," she said.

She had often spoken to her father and brothers of those she had met at Orangelands, and she had given the duelist a good reputation.

Those were not the days of frequent telegraph lines, many railroads and a newspaper in every village, so that one part of the country was isolated from another and news traveled slowly from point to point.

Dueling was tolerated, and it was not an uncommon thing to read of "affairs of honor" every day or so, while the duelist was not regarded in the light of to-day, but as somewhat of a hero.

Entering the parlor in her robe of mourning, Duncan Chatard started, for he had heard nothing of her brother's death.

He greeted her in his quiet, fascinating way, while she extended to him a welcome of exceeding warmth, and added:

"Your carriage is still at the door, I see, so I'll send it to the stables, and Buckner shall show you to your room—No, not a word, for I claim you as my guest, and shall keep you here as long as you will stay."

"My father, as I told you, is an invalid, and my brother is away on the plantation, but will soon return."

"Now go and make yourself at home, and then we will have a long talk together."

Thus urged, Duncan Chatard could not refuse, and he was led off to a charming room by Buckner, who soon had his traps there from the carriage, along with his valet, for the duelist loved his ease, and traveled in his own turnout, and with his coachman and body-servant.

He had come up the river on the boat, with his servants, carriage and horses, and landing at a point most convenient, had driven by easy stages into Virginia, having his riding-horse and guns along to aid him kill time on the road.

When he joined Eleanor in the parlor again, he was aware of who she was in mourning for, as he had asked Buckner, for he had believed it to be her father until she spoke of him.

"That's Massa Gardner there, sah, in the picture," said Buckner, pointing to a portrait of the dead man.

It was a strong, passionate face, the likeness caught by the artist before the countenance had been stamped by dissipation, and the duelist gazed upon it with great interest.

"He was kilt, sah, by a young gemman as belongs to a family our family has had a venditty with, sah, for hundreds o' years, and Massa Gardner kilt the father o' the young gemman in a duel, sah," volunteered Buckner.

The duelist sighed, for the words of the negro hit him hard.

When he reached the parlor, Eleanor again shook hands with him, and said:

"You are like a dear old friend, you know, Mr. Chatard; but let me present my father, Colonel Graydon."

The colonel greeted his guest most warmly, and said:

"Eleanor has often told me of you, and how you won her hand in a mock marriage by your remarkable shooting."

"We have the card framed in the library, and it is no wonder you have been so successful in the field as I hear you have."

"Been cut myself several times, and am now suffering from a wound an accursed Argyle gave me.

"But join me in a mint julep, sir, and to our better acquaintance— Ah, here is my son, all I have now, for my eldest was killed by an Argyle not long since.

"Gaston, my son, this is your sister's friend, and now to be ours, Mr. Duncan Chatard, whom you know well by name."

"Indeed I do, and glad to welcome you, Mr. Chatard," said Gaston, who had entered the parlor thinking some of the neighbors were there.

Duncan Chatard returned the compliment, and sized up the young man in an instant in his own mind:

"A handsome fellow, and a brave one, too, true as steel to a friend and a bad foe."

Such was his mental decision of the heir of Graydon Grange.

Dinner was soon after announced, and the duelist was compelled to admit that the Virginians lived like princes, and knew how to entertain.

The dead brother was alluded to now and then, and affairs of honor were discussed in a way of generalities.

The duelist completely won the father and son, and Eleanor was compelled to admit that he had never looked so handsome or seemed so fascinating to her before.

"You are going to remain with us some time, Mr. Chatard?" urged the colonel.

"I have told him he must stay until he tires of us," said Eleanor, while Gaston joined in with:

"Yes, for it will take weeks to show you around here.

"There are the best of trout in the streams, splendid shooting, from bear and deer to partridge and squirrels, and any quantity of fine scenery, good drives, and pretty girls, too, if you like ladies, and you belie your looks if you don't.

"If you get tired of me, give father a chance at you, and then there is Eleanor who can ride to hounds, drive a pair, and sing sweeter than any girl I ever listened to, while she is not a bad talker, either.

"Say you'll stay, Mr. Chatard, and we'll entertain you."

"I certainly cannot immediately tear myself away from such a charming home," was the reply, and Eleanor left the gentlemen to their wine and cigars, while she went to enjoy her letter from Anita, which the duelist had brought her, hidden away in a beautiful souvenir she had made for her.

The letter was written long before the reception of Eleanor's letter to her, telling of sad scenes at Graydon Grange, and it told of equally sad and painful happenings down on the Mississippi.

"I hide this letter away in the souvenir, because I do not wish to give a sealed letter to Mr. Chatard, and yet I care not to leave it open for another might see it," she wrote.

Then she told of the duel with Rupert Sheldon, the one that followed with Captain Scofield and how Doctor Sheldon had been the third that Chatard had to meet and how sad had been his fate.

She told of Irene Sheldon's marriage to her lover, who was supposed to be dying, and all else in which the duelist had been connected.

Eleanor shuddered as she read, and said: "How strange that he should be so drawn into a cruel vendetta, as those of my family have been.

"Ah! this is a sad, a cruel world.

"But who would ever suspect that man of being the deadly one that he has proven himself?

"I noticed the scar on his forehead, for the red mark is there, and wondered how he had received the wound.

"Poor Irene Sheldon, and poor me!"

She put away her letter for the gentlemen were coming, and soon after she and Duncan Chatard were singing together some of the duets they had learned at Orangelands.

"El, that is the kind of man I would like to see your husband," was Gaston Graydon's comment when he kissed his sister good-night.

And Colonel Graydon was of the same opinion as his son.

And Eleanor—the sequel will show.

CHAPTER XXXV. THE SECRET TOLD.

DUNCAN CHATARD decided to remain a week at least, at the hospitable home of Graydon Grange.

He had a most charming room, the view was superb from his windows, the air all he could desire, the table could not be surpassed and the wines were simply exquisite.

A cream punch, a mint julep or some other tempting drink seemed to haunt him continually, for a little negro with a silver salver was continually at his heels to entice him to take something to refresh him.

Gaston showed him the burying-ground of the Graydons, and gave him a history of the duels his people had fought in the past, while his

father entertained him indoors and upon the piazzas.

But he was looked upon as Eleanor's particular guest, and she was thrown a great deal with him.

She told him of their late sorrows, and dwelt upon the fact that the man then lying under sentence of death in prison, was the one who had saved her life.

In the heart of Duncan Chatard there could be but one love.

He was not a man to give up his whole heart and soul twice in a lifetime.

He might love again, but it would never be as he loved Irene Sheldon.

He saw that Eleanor was beautiful, in face and form, and her character was a lovely one.

She was a woman to win his heart had not that heart already been won.

He heard her story about her rescue by Harold Argyle, and suspected the truth that she loved him.

He could not but see how similar their cases were, for he loved the daughter of a race with whom his own family were at war, and that love was returned, even though the object had become another's wife.

Eleanor Graydon loved Harold Argyle, in spite of the vendetta between their families, and he loved her, Duncan Chatard felt assured.

A marriage divided him from Irene, and a prison kept Eleanor from Harold Argyle.

All these things did the duelist con over as he stayed at Graydon Grange.

It was on his mind all the time that he was legally bound to Eleanor, through the ceremony which Planter Bernard had performed.

He was glad to find that Eleanor was interested in no young man in the neighborhood, or engaged to one as he feared she might be.

That there was a secret tie between her and Harold Argyle he did not suspect, but regarded it as a love that must not be known between them.

Of course he would rather have found Eleanor heart free; but had he a free heart to offer her?

He let the days go by until he felt that their former friendship was upon a firm basis, and then he decided to speak to her upon the subject that must not be neglected.

At first he decided to wait until after the execution of Harold Argyle, but this he decided he would not do.

So they walked out one day into the garden, and sat down in the little summer-house.

His manner as usual was gentle, and yet there was something in his face that told Eleanor he wished to speak to her upon a matter of importance.

She hoped that it was not love, that he was not going to offer himself, for, though she was strangely drawn toward the man, there was yet no love for him in her heart such as he would wish to claim.

"Miss Eleanor, do you know just why I came to see you?" he asked, after awhile.

"Was there any motive other than to make me a friendly visit?"

"Yes."

"Indeed?" and she arched her brows with surprise.

"You must promise not to get angry with me at what I tell you, nor with one of whom I will tell you."

"Can I promise?"

"I will ask you first if you do not think a father may be excusable for doing an act that is wrong, if thereby he can save a loved child from sorrow and suffering?"

"I think the circumstances oftentimes excuse the means," was the reply.

"Well, now, I know a case in point where a father, with an only child, thought that he might save her much suffering by what appeared to all concerned, excepting himself, a mere joke, but which he used to prevent his daughter's life, as he believed, from being made wretched, and yet he acted for, as he believed, the good of all.

"Now would you not forgive such a father?"

"I think I could readily do so."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for you are interested in the matter."

"I?"

"Yes."

"Pray tell me how."

"You remember the day at Orangelands when we had the shooting-match?"

"Yes, indeed, I'll never forget it, for do you know you deceived me that day?"

"I deceived you?"

"Yes; you shot well, yes, splendidly; and then, when I did not believe better marksmanship could be displayed, you made your wonderful record of eighteen shots in that card, on a wager with me."

"It was not my intention. I assure you, for at first Mr. Bernard loaded the pistols and he did not give them the correct charge of powder.

"When I loaded it was different.

"He suggested the wager we made, and I won."

"And I paid the wager," said Eleanor, with a smile.

"You paid more than you thought."

"How so?"

"Suppose I tell you that the ceremony went through was a real one?"

He saw her start, saw her face grow livid and she looked as though she would faint.

But, as though he did not notice her emotion, he went on:

"I do not care to put censure on another, but yet I would not have you deem me a party to a plot against you.

"It was the impulsive act of Mr. Bernard, who, fearing that I would claim his daughter in marriage, sought to prevent it.

"He liked me as a friend, he feared I would not make his daughter happy, and he took advantage, on the spur of the moment, to bind me against doing so.

"I heard all and forgave him, and then came to see you.

"I came to tell you that Mr. Bernard was a county magistrate, and that his marriage was a legal one, for he gave you that certificate and the witnesses signed it.

"It appeared like a mock marriage, but it was a real one, and you are to-day my wife as surely as law can make you so.

"Of this Miss Bernard knows nothing, suspects nothing, and Mr. Bernard believed that he would make neither you or I unhappy by doing as he did.

"Now you know why I have come to you, and I have come to tell you this secret, to tell you that I will do all in my power to win your love, and should I do so, then we can, ignoring this secret marriage, be remarried here at your home.

"Have you heard all that I have said, Miss Eleanor, and will you consent to name some day in the future when you will become my wife before the world, or do you wish to make all public as it now stands and take steps for a legal disunion of the bonds that bind us together?"

Had he not talked on, had he stopped to ask Eleanor what she thought when the shock first came upon her, she would have been powerless to reply and perhaps have swooned away.

But his low, musical voice, his quiet way of telling her all, putting it in its best light, soothed her, and she gained the self-control she had momentarily lost.

But she was very pale, very tremulous with emotion, as she held out her hand and took his.

"You cannot tell how fearfully this you make known to me now unnerves me.

"I feel like one in a dread nightmare—nay, do not misunderstand me, for it is not at being bound to you, for were it to another I fear the shock would kill me, for there is more back of all this than you can understand or I can tell.

"It is a shock to me, and it makes me hate the man who sought to save his daughter by the sacrifice of another, her friend.

"Remember, I do not call it a sacrifice, for you are a man to win a woman's love, and I could never forget you and your kindness to me; but Duncan Chatard, I love another, I love the man now in prison, and I feel almost like putting your regard for me to a cruel test by saying, set him free, enable him to escape, and I will acknowledge you before the world as my husband.

"Of course there is no way for him to prove his innocence, for my dead brother has spoken, and the lips of Harold Argyle have told their story and been disbelieved.

"He would have to fly to a foreign land and be a fugitive.

"Set him free, enable him to escape, to save himself from the gallows, and one month after, if you will claim one who confesses her love for another, I will publicly marry you here at Graydon Grange and return with you to your home.

"Now, Mr. Chatard, Duncan, you have my answer, and it means that I will be to you a loving, loyal wife."

She clasped both of his hands as she spoke, and he gazed down into her suffering face and tearful eyes.

Then he said in a low, earnest voice:

"Eleanor, I will set that man free against every obstacle."

"They are fearful, for I have tried, yes and others, and only this morning had a letter telling me that bribery and all else would fail."

"I will not fail, for remember my reward."

"I will remember," she said.

"To-morrow I will depart, promising to return soon.

"When I do, it will be to bring you word that your—that Mr. Argyle is a free man."

"God bless you, Duncan Chatard."

The next day the carriage of Duncan Chatard rolled away from Graydon Grange, its master bound upon his important mission to rescue Harold Argyle from the clutches of the law, a no easy task as the reader can readily imagine.

CHAPTER XXXVI. POTOMAC'S MISSION.

THE master of Valley Vista received back his money one day from the hands of the Indian Potomac, with a letter from Eleanor stating that she had not found occasion to use it,

and that all attempts to free his grandson had been utterly abortive.

"He is confined in a cell," the detective writes me, "upon the third floor, with one grated window in it, and the iron door has a guard standing just outside.

"There he is ironed hands and feet to a bolt in the wall, and another guard is at the end of the corridor leading to his cell.

"The jailer, or assistant, is in the room constantly that she must pass through to see him, and where two or three might have been bribed, it is impossible to bribe all, for some will withstand temptation.

"Then too the idea has gone abroad that an attempt will be made to free him and the closest watch is kept.

"We must give up hope, I fear, and yet I still hope."

Such was a part of Eleanor's letter to the master of Valley Vista, written the morning of the interview with Duncan Chatard, but before it, and after she had received the letter from her detectives giving up the undertaking.

Potomac was her messenger, and had brought these letters from a distant town where they had been mailed.

In fact, the Indian was laying up a snug sum from his service for Eleanor.

She had not sent the letter, when she had her interview with the duelist, so there was a P. S. It read:

"I have more than hope, for there is one that has just enlisted in the cause of whom I expect wonders.

"Be cheered, for with this one to act for us, I believe all will come out as we wish."

This letter was then sealed and Potomac was dispatched with it to Valley Vista.

He took his rifle along, said he was going on a hunt for a couple of days, and in due time reached the plantation.

"There's an Injun out here to see you, master," said Hector, addressing the master who was seated in his easy-chair, a look of sorrow and suffering upon his face.

"An Indian? Why that is as startling as a call from a lady, Hector."

"He's awful fierce-looking, sah."

"Well, put my pistol under that paper, so I can get hold of it, and then fetch him in."

"There was a red-skin whose son I killed some forty years ago, who swore he'd get my scalp some day."

"Maybe he's the one, and he's come for it."

Hector bated an "Injun" as he called him.

He perhaps was more afraid of them than anything else.

So he went out, and standing quite a distance off, said:

"Massa Injun, massa say you come in ter see him."

"Come right quick," and without waiting to be shown the way, Potomac, for he it was, bounded up the stairs and went on the trail of the master of Valley Vista.

Hector was alarmed, but followed rapidly.

The Indian found the old gentleman, and, unannounced, gave him a surprise.

"Me Potomac."

"The deuce you are; what do you want here?" and the old man thrust his hand under the newspaper and clutched the butt of his pistol.

"Have writing for you."

"What! you are not a red-skin sheriff come to levy on my lands which my forefathers stole from yours, I hope?"

"Come long way—here writing."

He held out the letter of Eleanor as he spoke.

"Ah!"

Mr. Argyle grasped it quickly, and breaking the seal read it through.

The money was returned intact, and this fell unheeded upon the floor.

The Indian stood like a study in bronze looking at him as he read, but with one eye on the roll of bank-notes, whose existence he had not suspected as being in the letter.

But had he, Potomac would not have failed in his trust.

It was a lucky thing for Potomac that he was there when Archer Argyle read the P. S.

The old man uttered a mimic war-whoop of pleasure, and then grasped the red-skin by the hand and shook it warmly.

Then he counted out a roll of bills until they reached a hundred dollars and gave it to him.

Next he took the pistol and presented it to him, after which a gorgeous Mexican *serape* was taken from a chair near by and thrown over Potomac's shoulders.

The Indian was positively scared.

He began to think that he had gotten into the Happy Hunting Grounds without dying, had, in fact, become a red-skin Elijah.

"Hector!" yelled the old gentleman.

"Yes, master."

"Take this—this Indian gentleman out and give him the best dinner you can," and remembering he had heard that an Indian loved fire-water, he added:

"Get him drunk, in fact."

Hector vowed to himself he would do no such thing; but he led Potomac out to the kitchen, and that red-skin was as stuffed as a Christmas turkey when the negro got through with him.

In the mean time the master of Valley Vista had written a long letter to Eleanor, and then

set about to find other things that he could heap upon the Indian.

When Potomac did depart, he had a horse—and a good one, too—saddle and bridle, sundry blankets, a new rifle, a bundle of clothing, the Mexican *serape* referred to, pistol, and a hundred dollars in cash, while his pony was well packed with provisions of all kinds.

That he could not get him drunk seemed as great a source of regret to the old gentleman as it was a cause for delight to Hector, and Potomac went on his way with a look of perfect satisfaction upon his face.

And all this was owing to the P. S. in Eleanor's letter, which had given the master of Valley Vista real hope that his boy, as he called Harold, would escape the gallows.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS WORKERS.

A MAN stood in the window of a tall house, in a certain Virginia town, looking down upon the scene below him.

The house stood across the street from a walled-in structure with a tower, which sinners looked at shyly, for it was the jail.

Across the street, on the square on the other side of the jail, was another tall building, which the man in the window seemed to be surveying for some purpose unknown to the townspeople.

The jail and its yard occupied a square, and about it the neighborhood was thinly settled, for people do not like to dwell in the shadow of dismal surroundings.

The yard of the jail was surrounded by a high stone wall, some fifteen feet in height, and the jail proper stood in the center.

There were three stories to the jail, with low ceilings, so that the height was considerably below the buildings outside, but the tower rose up to their height.

There was but one entrance to the jail yard, and that through iron gates in the wall.

The man in the window appeared to be satisfied with his survey, and retired.

Two days after there was some excitement in the town, for it was to be blessed with a telegraphic wire.

It was to be in communication, through electricity, with the outer world.

The citizens were rejoiced, and they greeted the coming in of a wagon loaded with coils of heavy wire, tools and other curious things, with delight.

There were half a dozen men with the wagon, and they put up at the tavern and began work.

One appeared to be the chief, and he was a silent man, who said nothing more than that they were going to run some wires through different parts of the town, merging them at the Post Road, where others would join them.

The chief paid for all he needed, ran a wire across the tops of the houses in one direction, and then started a second across the houses in another direction.

The last survey led across from the tops of the tall houses already referred to, and permission was asked to connect the center with the top of the tower, which was just one hundred feet distant from the first house.

Permission was readily granted, for the town was to be so improved by the telegraph.

Ropes were stretched and the wire drawn across to the tower and thence on to the house-top beyond, and so on for quite a distance.

One afternoon, when the work was in progress, a carriage drove up to the jail and a gentleman alighted.

He rung the bell, and a guard, struck by his gentlemanly appearance, received him with marked politeness.

"I have a letter from the governor, sir, asking that I be permitted to visit a prisoner, one who is under sentence of death."

The guard called the jailer and the jailer read the letter.

It was from the Executive Mansion at Richmond, and said that the bearer wished to arrange some business matters with the prisoner under sentence of death, and the request was made that he be allowed to see the man privately.

The jailer consented, and then conducted the visitor to the cell.

Within sat Harold Argyle.

His face was pale, he looked haggard, but there was a look of indomitable pluck about him that showed his heart and soul were uncrushed.

He sat upon the side of his cot, and about one ankle there was an iron manacle, to which a chain was attached and made fast to the wall.

The cell was a small one, overlooking the jail-yard, and upon the top floor.

A table, a cot and a chair were the furniture.

The window was grated with iron bars an inch in diameter, and the door was a massive one, with a hole for the guard outside to look through.

The guard admitted the visitor, and the prisoner arose and bowed with polite surprise.

"Mr. Argyle, I have some matters of business which I know your testimony can settle satisfactorily, and as you are sentenced to die with-

in two weeks, I obtained a permit from the governor to visit you here."

"Anything that I can do, sir, I shall be happy to oblige you in.

"Be seated, please."

The visitor took out a bundle of papers from his pocket and turned to the guard.

"I am permitted to see the prisoner alone, my man."

The request was politely made and enforced with a bank-note.

The door was closed upon them, and the stranger drew the table up to the cot and the chair to the table.

"These are the papers, Mr. Argyle, and you are to look over them."

As he spoke he unfolded a paper and placed it before the prisoner.

Harold Argyle read a few lines, started, and reread.

His face flushed, then paled, and he glanced at the visitor.

"Pray read through, Mr. Argyle, and say if you can sign the papers, for they are important," and he made a motion as though to indicate that the guard was outside.

Harold Argyle sighed, and resumed reading. What he read was as follows:

"Show no surprise, utter no word to betray.

"The guard may be listening, and this is part of an arrangement for your escape.

"Every effort for a new trial and a pardon and a reprieve has failed, and nothing can save you from the gallows but an escape.

"Bribery has been tried, and failed, as there are too many to trust.

"Your grandfather and one you hold dear believe you innocent, and in serving you I serve them.

"I have laid a plan for your escape.

"You have noted the telegraph linemen at work of late.

"It is all a fraud, a part of a plot to save you.

"A heavy wire, with cords block and tackle is now stretched from the roof of the house to the north over the jail tower.

"The wires will uphold a thousand pounds, and from the line to the roof of this jail is but thirty feet.

"By means of ropes and pulleys a man will come from the roof of the house to the north out over this roof, and lower himself.

"It is nearly flat, and the location of your window is known.

"He will lower a rope-ladder, and you can ascend to the roof.

"Then you can be drawn across by men on the roof to the house opposite.

"He will follow, and all tracks are covered up, so that when morning comes not one of your rescuers can be found.

"I leave you here files with which to cut the iron bars at the very tip.

"Then you can press them out.

"I leave you a key to unlock your manacles, for it will unlock anything.

"Take it before I go, try it, and see for yourself.

"Bad weather is threatening, and the first stormy night after this the attempt will be made.

"You ought to file through your bars to-night and be ready.

"Do not go to sleep at night, but keep by the window and watch.

"When you are free all is arranged for your escape, and passage taken for you on a vessel which will sail from Norfolk to South America within ten days.

A complete disguise is ready for you, and there will be no barrier to your escape.

"Once you are free the world is before you, and here only certain death, an ignominious death upon the gallows.

"Innocent, as you know yourself to be, you can feel no reluctance at saving your life."

"When you are away all will be well.

"Not a soul will be compromised in your flight, for no one expects you to escape upward, and all who aid you have channels for their entire escape from detection.

"The wires about the town will alone remain as a souvenir of you, and those who expected you to die by a rope will find that you lived by a wire.

"Sign this paper, that I may read it to one deeply interested in you.

"I leave a note from her to you—read it, and give it back, for you may be searched after I am gone.

"The files and key you can hide in some way."

The prisoner read the communication with varying emotions.

If he could escape, gladly would he do so.

Who his strange visitor was he did not know, did not ask, but he saw that he was in the hands of a bold man, and one of genius to lay the clever plot he had done for his escape.

He took up the note referred to.

It was from Eleanor.

It said:

"Trust the bearer with your life.

"Do in all things as he directs.

"Leave the country, and when you have found a home, write to me, addressing your letter under cover of the name of my school-mate, whom I had been visiting when we met—you know the name and address.

"My every good wish attend you, and I hope all will be well."

"Will you do as I direct, Mr. Argyle?" asked the visitor, when the prisoner had twice read Eleanor's letter.

"I will, sir."

"You will sign this paper?"

In answer, Harold Argyle took up his pen from the paper and signed it.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Argyle, for your kindness.

"Good-by, sir."
 "May I not know your name, sir?"
 "It matters not, good-by."
 "Come, guard, open the door, for you are there, I know."

The guard obeyed, thus catching himself.
 "I paid you, sir, for your service, and you played the sneak; but, fortunately, my business with this gentleman was merely to get his signature to an important paper, and not something that you could retail to gossips."

The stern look of the speaker made the guard flinch, and he hastened to be as polite as possible to him, as he ushered him out of the cell, while the prisoner had a chance to hide his key and files very securely.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE VALET'S MISSION.

ELEANOR GRAYDON was much cast down for awhile after the departure of the duelist.

She felt as though her independence was wholly gone from her.

Then she began to think over how gently, how kindly Duncan Chatard had told her all.

He had hardly made her feel that she was bound to him, and yet the fact certainly remained that it was irrevocably so.

She was certainly his wife; there was no doubting that fact.

He certainly was a man to command respect, to win a woman's love.

But her heart was another's and she was legally bound to the duelist.

When she remembered that he had said emphatically that he would save the life of Harold Argyle, she felt cheered.

If he kept his word then the man she loved would go free, and have to find a refuge in another land.

And she?

Why she would have to be united to the duelist over again, become his wife before the world and content herself as such, while she would try to forget the one she really loved.

Feeling almost a perfect trust in the duelist, her spirits revived, and she waited for news.

One day a hired team from the nearest town to Graydon Grange, drove up to the door.

It brought Vim, the confidential servant of Duncan Chatard.

He had come from the city with a present from his master for each of the family.

Colonel Graydon was remembered, also Gaston, and Eleanor was given a superb whip, saddle and bridle.

In handing the gifts to Eleanor Vim had slipped into her hand a sealed package, which she had quickly hastened away to open.

It contained the paper signed by Harold Argyle, and a letter from Duncan Chatard.

The letter had no date, and was as follows:

"MY DEAR MISS GRAYDON:—I send you herewith, by my servant, Vim, a communication that explains itself.

"The signature, you will recognize, gives promise that all will be well.

"I have my plans laid so that no mistake can occur, and if nothing unforeseen should turn up at the last moment, there will be nothing to stand between our friend and perfect liberty.

"I send you this now to relieve your mind, and shall remain on the spot until the end is successfully consummated.

"Have no fear as to the result, for you have my pledge.

"Should this fail I have other plans in view.

"The accompanying souvenirs are mere blinds to get this communication into your hands.

"You shall have the first tidings of success that I can get to you.

"With every good wish,

"YOUR FRIEND."

After this letter Eleanor felt cheered.

She knew that the attempt, by that time, had been made.

If successful, then Harold Argyle was a free man.

If it had failed, how then could even the skill and boldness of the duelist help him?

However, she would not despond, but rather hope.

So by Vim she wrote a reply, thanking him for the beautiful gifts, and telling him that she would try the saddle, bridle and whip that very afternoon.

The colonel and Rupert also wrote letters of thanks for the remembrance of themselves, and Vim started upon his return to his master several hours after his arrival at Graydon Grange.

But he carried a secret letter as well.

This letter read:

"If ever a woman had a true friend, it is you, and I feel blessed by your friendship.

"What a brain you have to plan, and courage to carry out!

"Why, I never heard of such a perfect scheme as the one which the paper sent me divulges!

"I cannot, with you, see how it can fail; but should it do so, then I have the most perfect trust in your ability to devise another plan.

"Ere this, I suppose it is a success or a failure—God grant the former, and Heaven bless you!

"Come to us when all is arranged, and then we will talk over the future.

"Again, with more than thanks,

"Your attached friend,

"ELEANOR."

Such was the letter that Vim carried back to his master, and when he reached him the bold attempt of Harold Argyle to escape had been made, and—failed!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FAILURE.

HAROLD ARGYLE had sat in silent meditation for a long while, after the departure of the strange man who had visited him in his cell.

He had read the paper placed before him so carefully that every word was engraven on his brain.

He could hardly at first believe that a man had formed so grand, or bold a plan for his escape, and yet it had been done.

All that remained for him was to do his part.

That night, as soon as the darkness obscured his cell, he mounted on his table and began work.

He selected the right hand one of the five iron bars running perpendicularly to guard his window, and filed away at the very top.

Fortunately the wind was blowing hard and the sound was not heard by the guard without.

When the steps of the keeper told that he was going toward the end of the corridor, Harold Argyle worked hard.

When the sound of returning steps were heard he ceased work.

So it went on for a couple of hours and one of the bars had been filed through so that he could place his finger above it.

Then the second one was begun on, and after midnight this too was filed through.

The upper bar running horizontally was the next to be cut, and it was just dawn when the work had been completed.

These three, bent outward, would leave a space amply large enough for him to escape through.

The prisoner then took some bread, kneaded into it the iron dust from the filing, and filled up the space cut out, so that it would not show.

He had just gotten all to rights when day dawned, and he lay down to rest.

When the keeper brought his breakfast to him there was no shadow of suspicion upon his face.

"How are you, this morning, Mr. Argyle?" he asked, in a kindly tone, for the prisoner was a favorite with all in the prison.

"All right, thank you."

"You look a little pulled down, sir; but you must eat hearty and keep up your strength, for you'll need it."

"Yes."

"It looks like a storm, sir, and the wind blew hard all night."

"I would not be surprised if it stormed," was the reply, and Harold Argyle sat down and ate a hearty breakfast.

During the afternoon the storm set in and when darkness came it was pouring in torrents.

After being looked by at the night keeper, to see that all was right, Harold Argyle lay quiet for half an hour and then rose and stepped to the window.

Unfastening his shackles, he stepped upon the table and tried his strength upon the iron bar.

The first one, after a few efforts, he bent outward and downward.

The second one he managed to bend in the same way, and the cross-bar was also shoved out of place until a space two feet by two and a half was made.

Then he waited a few moments, and presently saw a dark object swing down before his window.

It was the form of a man.

It was raining hard, and a voice said:

"Are you there?"

"Yes."

"I will return to the roof, then, and leave the rope ladder I am on for you to come up by."

"I will go on ahead, and you hold this rope."

"When I pull it, come out of your window, climb to the roof and ascend to the peak, where there is a chair seat made fast to the wire overhead."

"Sit in it and pull yourself up to the wire, and you will be then drawn along to the roof of the house across the way."

"Have you a head that does not grow dizzy?"

"Yes."

"Good! Now wait until I pull the line."

"Here it is."

He placed in the hand of the prisoner a line, and then went up the rope ladder to the roof.

He had been gone but a moment when the loud clanging of a bell was heard.

It was the alarm of fire.

At the same time a light flashed up in the darkness, and wild cries were heard without in the streets.

What should he do? He had not received the signal.

The light shone brighter, showing that some building near was on fire.

Then he heard a cry above:

"A prisoner is escaping!"

Loud cries rung through the corridors of the jail, there were hurrying feet, and then his cell-door was thrown open.

A man had been sent to the tower to see

where the fire was, and he had seen a dark form in the air moving along the wire to the roof of the house across the way.

The fire in the other direction, and near at hand revealed that there was a line connecting with the roof of the jail and the wire, and ropes went over the edge.

It could mean but one thing, and that the escape of a prisoner.

Loudly he gave the alarm, and then rushed down to the corridor below.

There stood Harold Argyle when his cell door was thrown open, calm, upright, and with his arms folded upon his broad breast.

The thought seemed to seize upon him for an instant to make a desperate break for liberty.

But he checked it and said calmly:

"I see that fate is against it, keeper."

The lanterns revealed the bent iron bars and the rope ladder hanging before the window.

This showed the means chosen for exit.

The lookout from the tower told what he had seen, and a guard was hastily formed to go across the street and arrest all found in the house with which the wire connected.

Then Harold Argyle was removed to another cell, one on the ground floor, and known as the Death Den.

It was dark, dismal, and there was not space enough in the narrow apertures called windows for him to get through, while the door was of solid iron.

The prisoner uttered no word at this change of quarters.

He submitted in silence, and throwing himself upon the cot gave his bitter thoughts full rein.

He had tried to escape and failed.

In the mean time, the guard had gone to the house where the daring plot had seemed to originate.

The house was deserted, save that it had an old deaf man staying in it as keeper.

With some difficulty he was aroused.

He knew nothing more than that some of the "telegraph workmen" had rented rooms from him.

"How many?"

"Three."

"Where were they?"

"In their rooms," he guessed.

"Lead the way to them."

The old man did so, but no one was there.

The room had had occupants very lately, but was now empty.

The guards went to the roof.

The trap door had been left open, and there they found the whole contrivance for the escape.

The guards wondered at its cleverness.

Then they searched the house from garret to cellar, but no one was found.

They remembered that several of the telegraph men were at the hotel.

So there they went.

But those there had paid their bill early in the evening and had gone.

"Where?"

The landlord did not know.

Back to the jail the guards went, and, some three hours after the departure of the bold plotters, a general alarm was given.

Nothing could be really done until morning, and then the plotters were found to have surely left town.

If they went by carriage or horseback the hard rains had destroyed all tracks.

If they were in town no one could find them.

The night had been so bad that no one was abroad on the country roads, so that no carriage or horsemen had been seen.

But there remained their clever contrivance for the prisoner's escape, and it showed how thorough had been the plot, how well it had been managed; expense had been no object, and, but for the breaking out of the fire Harold Argyle would have cheated the gallows.

CHAPTER XL.

HOPE YET.

FULL of hope that all would be well with her lover, Eleanor Graydon had become almost cheerful, when one morning she received a letter in the handwriting of Duncan Chatard.

It was a pleasant letter, that was all, one that she might readily show her father and brother; but there was a slip of paper within containing these words:

"Failure last night but puts off future success.

"All is not lost, for there are other plans to develop, one that will prove sure if all others fail.

"I mail your father a paper with a full account.

"You have my promise—do not despair!"

The face of poor Eleanor paled at this.

She knew that the attempt had failed.

But, quickly coming upon it, was the word of the duelist that there was hope.

She trusted him, he had given his pledge, and she would not despair.

Then she went down to breakfast.

Her father and brother were already there, the latter with a paper in his hand.

"Sister, here is a paper with Chatard's card inclosed, and it is marked at an account of a most daring attempt to set that man Argyle free."

"Indeed, brother, and was it successful?" asked Eleanor with a calmness that surprised herself.

"Thank Heaven no! but I was just about to read it to father, so sit down and hear it, and then I shall go up to town and keep my eyes open, remaining there until after Harold Argyle is hanged."

"Let us hear the account, brother," suggested Eleanor.

Then, in a voice somewhat excited, Gaston Graydon read:

"ALMOST A SUCCESS!"

"A MOST DARING ATTEMPT AT A RESCUE!"

"BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH!"

"BOLD PLOTTERS TO FREE HAROLD ARGYLE THE CONDEMNED MURDERER!"

"For some time past our citizens have been in an ecstasy of delight over the prospect of having telegraphic communication between our town and the outer world.

"There was some surprise that a small place should receive such an honor over cities; but then the workmen came, wire and tools were brought and the work was begun.

"Numerous surveys were made, and at last several lines were started from a given point.

"That point was the tall, unoccupied house near the jail and overlooking it, and which has not been rented, as its heirs would not accept the rentals offered.

"But the Wire Workers paid the price, and several men domiciled there, while others remained at the hotel.

"A stout wire was stretched from the roof of this house, across to the Bennett Building, and the center rested upon the tower of the jail, which was freely offered for a purpose so plausible as to supply our town with a telegraph.

"In stretching the wires the workmen used rope, tackle and much else that did not seem necessary, but of course it was thought that they knew their business, and they did, they knew it excellently well.

"Last night they had all in readiness to utilize their work.

"They sent a man on the wire, by a seat contrivance, out over the roof of the jail; there he lowered himself, doubtless some nights before, and let down over the roof edge to the prisoner, files and a key.

"These were used by the prisoner in filing the iron bars, and in unlocking his manacles.

"At any rate he used them, and in the storm last night the attempt to escape was made.

"The prisoner had done his work, and was doubtless informed that all was ready for him to escape, for a man had gone out on the wire from the empty house, descended to the roof of the jail, and lowered a rope-ladder so that the condemned murderer could get out of his cell upon it.

"But just then the fire in Dubney's store broke out, a guard was sent out from the jail to the tavern, and he saw an escaping prisoner as he believed.

"But it was the rescuer, not the prisoner, and he disappeared on the roof of the wire-workers' retreat.

"The alarm was given, the prisoner's cell was thrown open and he was found within, his manacles off, the bars of his window cut and bent out, and all ready to take his departure.

"But for the breaking out of that fire he would have escaped, for so thoroughly did the rescuers lay their plans, that not a trace of them can be found, and the wire and their implements of work are all that our citizens have to remind them of their desperate and most clever plot to rescue Harold Argyle.

"The prisoner took his fearful disappointment most coolly.

"He would say nothing, and when threatened with harsh treatment if he did not confess, said that he had no fear, and really did not know who his rescuers were; but that they are a splendid lot and he thanks them for their grand effort in his behalf and only hopes not one of them will be discovered.

"He was taken to the cell known as the Death Den, and Jailer Price says that if he can get out of there by foul or fair means, without his knowing it, he is welcome to go.

"Within ten days more the prisoner is to be executed, and after this bold attempt at rescue he will be doubly guarded, even in the Death Den and manacles kept upon his hands and feet.

"If we have any new particulars we shall at once make our readers acquainted with the fact.

"In conclusion we may add that a reward of a thousand dollars has been offered for the apprehension of the rescuers."

Eleanor had listened with breathless attention to the reading of this account of the bold attempt of the duelist to rescue her lover.

That he had failed was shown to be an unlooked for catastrophe.

That he could rescue Harold Argyle now it was not in her heart to believe, for how was it possible for him to do so, when the poor prisoner was in double irons, doubly guarded and in the Death Den opening into the office of the jail?

It seemed beyond the power of man to accomplish this.

And yet he must know all and still had bid her hope.

She did hope, but ever so faintly.

That day her brother, Gaston Graydon, left for the town, and she knew that he would be argus-eyed in his watchfulness over the officials who watched the prisoner.

But poor Archer Argyle!

The blow she feared would crush him, and she must send him a cheering word.

So she went to her room and wrote a letter to him, telling him that all was not lost, to still have hope, for they had a giant enlisted in the cause to save his son.

An hour after Potomac was on his way to Valley Vista with the letter, and the Indian's face wore a look of delight, for he had not forgotten the reception he had met there on his former visit.

CHAPTER XLI.

AN OLD FRIEND.

THE town of — was still on the *qui vive*, for the excitement following the daring attempt to rescue Harold Argyle had not died out.

Then too the hanging of the prisoner was to soon follow.

That another attempt at rescue would be made not a soul in the town believed.

Still the jailer and his assistants were none the less cautious.

Not a single clew had been discovered as to who were the rescuers, for they had covered up their tracks beyond all discovery, and the citizens were compelled to laugh over the joke of how cleverly they had been "taken in" by the wire-workers.

Some days after the stage coach running into the town contained two passengers.

One of these was Gaston Graydon going to remain in town until after the execution of the prisoner, and the other was a priest in his ecclesiastical attire.

He had a dark, quiet face, his hair was white and cut short and he looked like a foreigner.

In fact there was a slight accent in his voice when talking.

Not knowing him, and being a good Catholic, Gaston Graydon introduced himself, touched by the sad expression of the priest's face.

"I am glad to meet you, my son; my name is Father Romano, and I am going to the town ahead of us, I may as well tell you, to visit a poor unfortunate man who was once my pupil, and who now is under the shadow of death."

"He is dying?"

"I may as well say so, for within a few days he is to end his life upon the gallows."

"You refer to Harold Argyle, father?"

"Yes, my son; you know of him then?"

"It was my brother whom he murdered."

"Ah! my son, you have my sympathy, as also has that poor boy for his deed."

"I heard of it, and I could hardly realize that he would have been guilty of such an act, for he has been well reared and his family have been good Catholics for generations, though it is true they have been engaged in a bitter, lawless and cruel vendetta."

"You have my deepest sympathy, my son."

Gaston was impressed by the low earnest tone of the priest.

He remembered to have heard that Harold had been reared under a Catholic priest, who was his tutor in his earlier years, and that Father Romano should wish to visit his pupil when so near death seemed but natural.

He told the priest all about the attempted escape of the prisoner, which he appeared not to have heard of, and when the stage drove up to the hotel the two were most friendly.

Father Romano was given a pleasant room, and then he sauntered out to visit the parish priest, he said, for he inquired the way to the Catholic Rectory.

That worthy person was an old man, verging on three-score and ten, and he received his brother prelate warmly, and they had a long talk together, Father Romano telling why he had come.

"Poor boy, I have been myself to see him daily, but it will be so much more of a comfort for him to see you, the preceptor of his younger days, and I'll see to it that you are allowed to take my place," said good old Father St. Joseph of the town parish.

It was nightfall when the two priests arrived at the jail, and they were at once admitted, for Jailer Price was one of the parishioners of Father St. Joseph's church, while the good man's presence was always an *open sesame* to any place where there was suffering, sorrow and distress.

"I will have to leave you at once to return to vespers, father," said Father St. Joseph, and turning to Jailer Price, he said:

"My son, Father Romano is the old preceptor of our unfortunate prisoner, and has come to cheer his latter days, so give him admittance as you would me."

"I will, father, not only because you ask it, but because I want the poor fellow to get all the consolation he can before he dies."

"It is fearful to see a man like he is die on the gallows, father."

"Sad is it to see any man's soul thus ushered out of life, my son; but far more distressing when it is such a man, as you say," and Father St. Joseph departed from the prison.

But Father Romano remained, and was admitted to the cell where sat the prisoner.

The jailer himself admitted him, with the remark:

"Your old tutor, Father Romano, has come to see you, Mr. Argyle."

Then the door was closed and the priest was shut within the gloomy cell with the prisoner.

Over by the table, reading by the aid of a small lamp, sat the prisoner.

He made a sad, but splendid picture as he sat there.

His dark face was stern and his eyes bright, while his fine form was plainly seen by the light of the lamp.

In his hand he held a book.

It was a late novel, and he had been reading it with seeming interest in spite of the fact that the hangman's noose was about his neck.

At the words of Jailer Price he rose quickly, his chains clanking dismally as he did so, and he stepped toward the priest, while to his lips rose the words:

"Why Father Romano is—"

Then the priest's arms were placed upon his head, as though in blessing, and the head of the holy man bent to the shoulder of the prisoner, and what he would have spoken remained unsaid.

CHAPTER XLII.

TO KEEP HIS PLEDGE.

POTOMAC carried out his errand perfectly, for he reached the plantation of Valley Vista and was admitted most promptly to the presence of the master, for Hector remembered that he had brought good news before, and did not deem it necessary to announce him.

Old Archer Argyle grasped the Indian's hand with considerable warmth, and then read the letter brought to him.

He was at a very low ebb in spirits, for he had read the account of the failure to rescue Harold by the wire-workers.

That it could be accomplished after that failure, the old gentleman did not believe.

But the letter from Eleanor Graydon bade him hope.

It told him that a perfect giant, for skill, cleverness and courage was working for his son, and bade him not despair, for the secret worker had said hope—that he would save him.

So the old master of Valley Vista wrote another letter to Eleanor, thanking her, calling her a noble girl, and ending with:

"God bless the noble man who is our friend and the rescuer of my boy."

And Potomac told him to another snug sum of money and some more presents, until he felt that if the neighboring planters were to search his camp he would be looked upon as a highwayman.

But he was willing to take the chances of the search, and returned promptly with the letter.

Eleanor also rewarded him, and then went off into the woods to read the letter, for she had been watching for Potomac's return.

Upon going back to the house she was given some letters from the mail, and one was from Duncan Chatard.

It was simply a note, telling her that all was going well in his "business affairs," which she understood to mean the plot to rescue, and ended with a hope that he would soon see them all at Graydon Grange.

Another letter received was from Anita Bernard.

It told of home and home affairs, and then went on to say:

"I suppose you have seen Duncan Chatard before this and read my letter to him.

"Don't fall in love with him, for I am half smitten myself with the handsome, sad-faced fellow.

"Since he killed Doctor Sheldon in their duel, nothing else has been talked of in high and low life, I hear.

"It is said that young Rupert Sheldon's wounded arm is healed, and upon the return of Mr. Chatard he will hold him responsible for the death of his father, which he thinks cancels his having been given his life by the duelist, as all will call our friend.

"It is also said that Captain Claude Scofield, who was so desperately wounded by Mr. Chatard intends to call him out upon his return.

"Captain Scofield is not yet well, but is improving rapidly, and I believe I wrote you was married to Miss Irene Sheldon when he was believed to be at the point of death.

"So you see that when Duncan Chatard returns he will have two duels on his hands, and if he kills both Scofield and Sheldon, that must end the vendetta, for there will be no one left to keep up the feud on the side of the Sheldons, unless Mrs. Scofield decides to avenge her father, brother and husband.

"But it alarms me to think that poor Chatard must fight again, after all he has gone through; but still, where one has half a dozen human lives on one's conscience to feel remorse for, I suppose one or two more will not add very much to the weight.

"How I do feel for you in all your suffering and sorrow, my dear Eleanor.

"Had you not better come to me for a rest and freedom from all?

"You know how rejoiced I would be to see you.

"I trust sincerely that the gallant hero who saved your life may not die, as you have feared."

Then the letter ran into other happenings, hopes and regrets; but altogether it was a great boon to Eleanor to receive it.

As the days went by she became pale, anxious and nervous.

She could sleep but little, her appetite failed her, and she watched eagerly for every mail.

Her brother wrote of his trip to town, and meeting in the stage coach the old tutor of Harold Argyle, a Catholic priest, who was going to be present with the poor man in his last hours.

He told how highly the priest had spoken of Harold Argyle in his younger days, and that he seemed to love the condemned man very dearly.

Then he told how the town was all excitement since the daring attempt at a rescue of the murderer, and how he had visited the wires put up over town as a blind, and the one stretched over the jail as a means of escape.

"There is no possible chance now of escape, nothing can save him, and I shall remain in town until after the execution."

Thus his letter ended.

Another letter had come to Eleanor.

It was mailed from the very town which was to be the scene of execution.

Opening it, for she did not recognize the hand, she saw a sketch in colors, skillfully executed, of a stone building, with iron doors and grated windows.

Just peeping out from a bank of dark storm-clouds was the sun, and a ray of golden light fell upon one window of the stone structure.

In that ray she traced four letters:

"HOPE."

She knew from whence came the sketch.

It was the work of the duelist, and she said, earnestly:

"He still bids me hope, and *I will!*"

CHAPTER XLIII.

FATHER ROMANO.

WHEN Harold Argyle's words were checked upon his lips, he had said:

"Father Romano is—"

Then it was that the priest's hands had fallen upon his head, and he heard a very decided whisper in his ear:

"Hush!"

He was silent at once.

He could not understand why, but he obeyed without a word.

"My poor son, I have come to you in pity for your misfortunes, and the good Father St. Joseph has said that I can take my place by your side in your last days.

"Come, my son, and we will sit down and talk of the past."

The voice of the priest was gentle and low, and he led the prisoner to his cot.

The door had been closed, and with a priest within, there was no fear that the good Irishman who was the guard without would disturb the privacy of the scene, or break in on its solemnity.

But Father Romano was a low-spoken man, and had there been a listener he would have supposed that he was muttering prayers.

"Kneel down, my son, here by my side," he said.

Without a word Harold Argyle obeyed.

Then in a voice as though praying, and with his mouth close to the ear of the prisoner, Father Romano said:

"My name is not Father Romano, as you know, for he is dead.

"Nor am I a priest, but one who is your friend and who has come here to save you.

"Father St. Joseph does not suspect the cheat, so all is well, and these stupid fools are also deceived.

"To-morrow morning I will call again and remain an hour with you; but to-morrow night I will come prepared to stay here while you go out.

"I am just your size, and our faces are not unlike.

"This is a white wig I wear, and you can put it on after I have cut your hair close and shaved off your mustache.

"I will also bring some coloring to darken your face, which has been bleached by your long confinement and is very pale.

"I will say as little as possible to the guards, and you must imitate my voice, speaking with an accent as I do.

"When I come to-morrow night I will place my robes over your suit, and I will give you money for all your wants.

"I will take your place upon the cot, you boldly rap on the iron door and ask to be let out, bid me good-night with a blessing, bless the guard and pass out fearlessly.

"The guard will escort you to the outer door, and you can hold your handkerchief to your face as though shedding tears.

"Once out, make your way to the home of Father St. Joseph.

"At the gate a man will await you, and a carriage will be near to take you to a place of safety.

"All arrangements are made for your escape, disguise, and you can trust those in whose care you will be.

"Do you understand?"

Harold Argyle was so amazed at first that he hardly believed what he heard.

There was certainly a bold and clever man at the bottom of all this, as his rescuer.

Then he said in a low voice:

"And Father St. Joseph?"

"Knows no more about this than the guard without."

"Who are you?"

"It does not matter who?"

"Do you think I would go and have you to suffer?"

"I am paid for that."

"Paid for what?"

"Why, your going will not be discovered until breakfast is brought in the morning, and not then if I can pretend to be ailing and ask to sleep on."

"But it soon after will be discovered?"

"True, but if found out half an hour after you leave the jail, the plans are so well laid you cannot be taken."

"But when discovered you will suffer?"

"I will be asked who I am, and I will tell them it is a riddle for their guessing."

"I will be tried for rescuing a prisoner, and they'll sentence me to imprisonment I suppose; but what care I for that, for I tell you I am well paid for the term I may serve, and when I get out will be well off."

"Who pays you?"

"Who would pay so large a sum but your grandfather?"

"Bless him! but you put this on a financial basis?"

"Yes, for I sell my freedom for so much by saving you from the gallows."

"You should be contented if I am."

"I am, my friend, and when you come out of jail you will find a friend in me who you will see can appreciate the service you have done."

"I believe you; but you understand all?"

"Everything."

"To-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"Watch me knock and go out."

"Yes."

"Do the same to-morrow-night."

"I will."

"Adieu, my son, I will see you to-morrow," said the pretended priest in a loud voice, and he stepped to the door and rapped.

The guard opened it, and received a blessing which he believed genuine, and the prisoner was given a parting salutation.

Then the bold plotter stepped out, the iron door swung to, and Harold Argyle was again alone.

CHAPTER XLIV.

UNDER FALSE COLORS.

PRETENDED Father Romano called the next morning at the prison, and was duly admitted to the cell of Harold Argyle.

He had a long talk with the prisoner, and then took his departure.

The guard outside had no desire to meddle with the prisoner in his spiritual comfort, and feeling that a few more days would end all, was in sympathy with him.

The afternoon came on disagreeably, for a rain began to fall, and toward nightfall the wind blew hard and the downpour drove all from the streets who had not important business to call them out.

"This is the very night for us," muttered Father Romano, as he called himself, drawing his clothing about him more closely when he left the hotel to go upon his important mission.

He was going out prepared for his dangerous game against the prison officials.

Not a thing did he leave in his room, other than a note on the table for the landlord, inclosing a bank-note for his bill.

Other trace as to who or what he was he was determined should not be found.

He wended his way directly to the jail, arriving there half an hour before closing-up time.

He was anxious to be in the cell with the prisoner when nine o'clock came.

"It was kind of you, father, to venture out on such a night," said Jailer Price, as he admitted him.

"Ah, my son, men of my calling must know no sunshine or storm."

"We go at all hours of the day and night, and if I can soothe the last hours of my unfortunate young friend I shall be content."

As he spoke the pretended priest was staking the water from him, and kept his face well away from the jailer.

Jailer Price himself conducted him to the cell of the condemned man, saying as he did so:

"It is nearly closing time, father, and the night watch will soon be on."

"But you can remain as long as you wish, only rap when you wish to depart, and the guard here will conduct you to the door."

"Thank you, my son, and accept my blessing," and with this the pretender stepped within the cell.

Harold Argyle was there, seated upon his cot, and heavily ironed as before.

Father Romano greeted him in a low, kindly tone, and then took a case from beneath his cloak.

It contained a razor, brush, soap, and a pair of scissors.

He arranged the lamp so as to cast a shadow, should the door open, and prepared to have all in readiness for the closing hour.

It soon came, and then he hastily set to work and cut the hair of the prisoner close.

The face was then closely shaved, and next the manacles were unlocked by a key he brought with him.

This all took some little time, and then the gray wig of hair was drawn over the head of the prisoner, and he put on over his clothing the garb of the pretended priest.

"Here is a pocketbook containing all the money you will need for the present, and letters of introduction, also."

"Go, as I told you, to the gate of the house of Father St. Joseph, and one awaits you there whom you are to implicitly follow."

The man was dressed in a dark suit, resembling the clothes worn by the prisoner, and he slipped over his upper lip a false mustache, and on his head a wig of hair that resembled that of Harold Argyle.

Then he snapped the manacles upon his ankle and wrist, and took a seat on the cot.

It would have taken a very close observer to note that it was not the prisoner, as he sat there with bowed head.

It would also have taken a keen glance to discover in the prisoner other than the supposed priest.

"You are sure you are content, on what pay you receive, to remain here and accept imprisonment for your bold rescue of me?"

"I am perfectly sure, sir."

"It is not too late to retreat."

"I have decided, Mr. Argyle."

"One word, sir."

"Well?"

"Who is at the bottom of this daring device?"

"I am."

"Is there not a lady interested in it?"

"There is a lady deeply interested in your escape, and from her wish all has been done."

"God bless her, and you, too."

"Remember, I will some day prove my appreciation of this act."

"They will send you to prison for me, perhaps two years, but you shall be more than repaid for it."

"Farewell."

He held out his hand, and the daring rescuer grasped it, while he murmured:

"Mimic my voice, and be careful, for God's sake."

"Don't weaken."

"Never fear," and in the coolest manner possible the prisoner stepped to the iron door and rapped.

The guard's step was heard approaching, and then the creaking of the key in the lock.

Then the door opened on its heavy hinges and the guard glanced in.

It was the Irishman of the night before.

"Ready to go, father?"

"Yes, my son."

There stood the priest, there on his cot sat the prisoner, as it seemed, so who could suspect treachery?

"Good-night, my son, and remember all I have told you."

"I will see you to-morrow."

There was not a quiver in his voice, and the tone of the other had been perfectly caught.

The prisoner had turned up his collar, muttering something about the rain, and said to the guard:

"Bless you, my son, for you have a sad duty to perform."

"Sad, indeed, father, it's after being; but it's a livin' in certainty, and that's more than I can be sayin' of the poor prisoner," responded the guard, as he led the way along the corridor.

He knocked at the door leading into the office, a bar was removed and the night watchman opened it.

"Be after showin' the good father out to the strate, Jimmie," said the guard.

The supposed priest stepped into the office and with another about remark the storm, which was pelting the windows hard, he crossed the floor.

"You've forgotten your umberel, father," said Jimmie.

"Oh, yes, thank you, my son," and the escaping prisoner took the umbrella, and went on to the door which was opened for him.

Across the few steps of yard he went to the outer gate, and this Jimmie unfastened.

"Good-night, my son, and be good to the poor prisoner within," said the supposed priest, as he stepped out into the street.

Jimmie made reply and then closed and locked the gate, anxious to run back out of the storm.

The prisoner was almost tempted to utter a wild cry of joy at his freedom.

But he restrained himself with an effort and hastened on.

He knew the town well and soon reached the gate of Father St. Joseph's house.

There, in the shadow of a tree stood a form that stepped forward and quickly said:

"You are Father Romano?"

"Yes."

"Come with me."

He led the way down the deserted street to where there was a vacant lot thickly wooded.

Into this he turned and there, hiding away, was a covered buggy, drawn by two horses.

"Get in and the driver knows where to take you."

The prisoner obeyed, and the next moment the man holding the reins drove out into the street, and at a fast pace the two horses were sent along through the darkness and the storm.

Harold Argyle had escaped the gallows.

CHAPTER XLV.

A SURPRISE.

WITHOUT the shadow of a suspicion, that the man condemned to death was driving away through the night, the guard at the cell door remained on duty until the morning.

Then he was relieved by the day watch, and soon after the man with the prisoners' breakfast was admitted to the cell.

There lay the supposed prisoner, with his clothes all on and he was actually asleep.

"Here is your breakfast, sir," said the man, who had received a number of generous "tips" from Harold Argyle.

"I prefer to sleep," was the drowsy response, and the man put the waiter on the table and departed, muttering to himself:

"It's well he can sleep, poor fellow."

The hours crept by until nearly noon, when the prison surgeon arrived, and, as it was feared the prisoner might be ill he was admitted to the cell.

"Hain't heard him all the morning," the watchman said:

As the surgeon entered Jailer Price also came along, and then the form on the bed arose.

Jailer Price started back.

In the light that shone through the narrow apertures he beheld a man about the size of the prisoner, but with a wig and false mustache on.

There was a casual resemblance, but it was not the prisoner.

Still this stranger was in the cell of Harold Argyle, he had a suit of clothes something like his, and was certainly ironed.

"In the devil's name who are you?" cried Jailer Price, and his voice rung through the jail like a trumpet.

The stranger laughed lightly, while he responded:

"All that remains of Harold Argyle."

"Hal and he?"

"Is beyond your clutches, I am happy to say."

Jailer Price was wild with passion and excitement.

The prisoner had escaped, that was certain; but when, how, and by what means?

He yelled for all the officials in the jail to come to him, while the man in irons calmly kept his seat upon the cot and looked on.

The jailer questioned the men as they came around the night-watch, and made matters very lively for all concerned.

It was evident that all were scared, and that the prisoner had escaped.

When the excitement was at its height, the stranger spoke.

His calm words at once commanded silence.

"Cease this hubbub, and I will tell you what I know about the affair, and I think I know more than any one else."

"Well, sir, why do you not speak out?"

"Why did you not tell before?"

"I was waiting for you to cool off, jailer, and somewhat enjoying the fun myself."

"You won't enjoy it long," was the significant response.

"Well, jailer, I will tell you that I have abiding faith in the innocence of Harold Argyle, and did not wish to see a legal murder committed.

"You will all, judge, jury, and officers, thank me some day for this, that I did not let you hang an innocent man.

"As a former plot failed to free the prisoner, I decided to take it upon myself to do so, and you see I did not go far wrong.

"I am not a priest, and I imposed upon good Father St. Joseph as I did upon you and others.

"I came last night, shaved the prisoner, cut his hair, put on him my white wig and robes, and then locked myself in these irons, placed this false mustache upon my upper lip and this wig on, and went to sleep very comfortably, with the thought that I had done a good action."

"And the prisoner?"

"Quietly walked out of the jail, and all you dogs of law can never strike his trail."

The jailer was still furious, but started the "dogs of law," as the stranger had called the officers, upon the trail of the prisoner.

The alarm was spread, there were rewards offered and the whole town was wild with excitement.

Many were glad of the prisoner's escape, but many felt that they had been treated badly, having been cheated out of a hanging.

But all admired the pluck of the stranger.

Who he was no one knew.

He declined to give his name or say aught about himself whatever.

He simply said that he had done what he

deemed to be his duty, and would accept the consequences.

He was called upon by many, and among them Gaston Graydon.

When the latter came into the cell he lowered his head and spoke in a low voice:

"I have seen you somewhere before, my fine fellow, so what is your name?" said the young planter.

"John Smith," was the response.

"That is not your name."

"A rose by any other name," quoted the prisoner.

"You shall suffer for this."

"I expected to when I did what I did."

A man came then to tell Gaston Graydon that a horse he had ordered to go in chase of the prisoner was at the door, and he left the cell sorely puzzled as to where he had seen the bold rescuer before, but confident that he had done so.

In the mean time the officials were discussing as to what was to be done with him.

Not a thing had been found upon his clothing by which he could be identified.

He wore no ring, watch or anything that could be found, and not a scrap of paper had he about him.

He was a mystery to all, that was certain, and wholly unknown.

Of course he could not be treated as a prisoner under sentence of death, but only "as an accomplice in crime" could be the charge brought against him, and he was therefore taken to another cell and freed of his irons.

He took affairs easily, showed no anxiety regarding himself, and said that he felt none as to the prisoner, for he was beyond reach of the law.

Strangers in town were arrested under suspicion of being accomplices, but released as nothing could be proven, and Father St. Joseph was cross-questioned until he lost his temper, but all were assured that he was wholly innocent and simply had been taken in by the clever rescuer.

It was discovered that Harold Argyle had had as a tutor in his boyhood a Catholic Priest, Father Romano.

But Father Romano had died while at Valley Vista.

Officers were sent to the Harold Plantation to watch for the prisoner, and large rewards were offered for his capture.

But the days passed away and not a word was heard of him, not a clew was found.

In a short while the bold rescuer, who took life in the coolest manner possible was to be tried, and it was said that the law would deal with him most severely.

Thus the day of execution passed and Harold Argyle escaped the gallows.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE MYSTERIOUS PRISONER.

ONE night, a week after the escape of Harold Argyle, the prisoner who had chosen to remain in his stead, was pacing the cell on the second floor to which he had been assigned.

It was a strong cell, and escape from it was not considered a possibility.

The prisoner had not shaved since his incarceration, and looked a little seedy; but he had shown no impatience at his incarceration, or any anxiety as to what would be done with him.

It was after nine o'clock and the night-watch was on duty.

Stepping to his grated door the prisoner called out softly:

"Mr. Lucas!"

"Well?"

And the watchman appeared at the door without.

"I believe you were on duty in the office the night that Mr. Harold Argyle surrendered himself?"

"Yes."

"Your name is Steve Lucas?"

"It is."

"When Argyle rode up, who else was in the office of the jail besides yourself?"

"No one."

"He surrendered to you?"

"He did."

"And you?"

"Locked him in the cell that he tried to escape from some weeks ago."

"Mr. Lucas, you are a poor man?"

"I have my pay."

"How is it that you are on duty in this corridor the past two nights?"

"Jailer Price's team ran away with him, and he and the watchman of this tier, who was with him, were both hurt, so I came up from the office to stand watch."

"And who is the officer in your place?"

"How does that concern you?"

"I'll tell you."

"Well?"

"I set Argyle free, determined to take the consequences; but what's the use, if I can get away, of staying here?"

"Now, I happen to know that you are a single man, with no ties in this part of the country.

"The fact is, Mr. Steve Lucas, I recognize you as an old acquaintance; in fact, as Lucas Stephens, an overseer on a Louisiana plantation, who found it convenient to leave that part of the country, some years ago, from having shot a man."

"Now, I happen to know that when Harold Argyle delivered himself up to you, he asked you to do a favor for him."

"That favor was to go to his rooms in the university chambers and get a portrait and his desk."

"This you did, for a consideration, and you received the consideration, too, and it was a generous one."

"Now, Mr. Lucas Stephens, I could make trouble for you, as you see; but instead, I wish you to help me."

"I have some money about me that the jailer did not get when he searched me, and I would like to show you that I have a key that will unlock this door, and, making my way to the office, can go on out and open the wall gate."

"You can be away looking around the building when I slip out, and I will leave a note for Jailer Price, telling him that he should have looked in the *small of my back* when he searched me, where he would have found keys, a line, files and money, which, as he overlooked, I took the liberty of using to effect my liberty when you were not near my cell."

This exonerates you, and besides, I place in your hands a handsome sum of money."

As he spoke the prisoner put his hands up to the back of his neck, and began to draw upon a string, at the end of which was attached the articles spoken of, all made into a flat pad to fit in the back between the shoulder-blades.

The guard had turned pale when he saw that the prisoner knew him, though he could not recall him to save his life.

He had fled, after killing a man, as he supposed; but the man had gotten well, a fact that he did not know, though the prisoner did.

That he had accepted a bribe from Harold Argyle he knew would also cause him trouble, and so, as he was in for it, he preferred to let the prisoner go, as he would also gain a handsome souvenir in the way of cash for so doing.

It happened so that the jailer and one keeper being injured by the runaway, it left only himself and one other on duty, and, as there happened to be no very important prisoners just then in the jail, they were considered amply sufficient.

In the office there was no one, for that was his place at night, and he was expected to keep moving all over the jail from time to time, while the other guard would also be making constant rounds.

When the mysterious prisoner, without considering for a moment that the keeper would refuse, drew the package out from behind his back, he counted out a couple of hundred dollars and handed it to him.

The guard clutched it in silence.

"Now tell me who is in the office?"

"No one, for the door is left ajar so that I can hear the gate-bell if it rings."

"And the other guard?"

"Is below somewhere."

"Well, look him up and get him away from the office."

"But that letter to the keeper?"

"I will write it, and when I have let myself out with the key, I will hang it, the files and the note on the gate."

"Can you get out?"

"See here!"

He took the key attached to the package, thrust his hand through the grating and quickly unlocked the door.

"It's a wonderful key."

"Yes, an adjustable one, and a clever little piece of workmanship of my own invention."

"Now to write the note."

He sat down to his table and wrote:

"11 O'CLOCK P. M."

"JAILER PRICE:—

"I regret, for your sake, not to be able to remain for my trial; but as you did not search *between my shoulder-blades* you failed to find a flat package containing a key, which will open any of your old time locks, and also files and a line I had put away for use if opportunity off red."

"I will watch the guard, and when I can do so, will slip out and make my way to liberty, and it will be as useless to hunt for me as for the gentleman I rescued from the gallows."

"I leave the key and files on the outer wall as a souvenir of your

"MYSTERIOUS PRISONER."

The letter was read to the guard, who seemed satisfied and walked away, remarking:

"When you hear me let fall my bunch of keys, leave your cell."

The prisoner waited, and ten minutes after he heard the signal agreed upon come faintly from a distant corridor.

Then he slipped out of his cell, walked quickly down-stairs, passed through the deserted office and was soon out at the gate.

His key fitted the lock, and he left it in it, with the pad containing the line and files attached.

Another moment he was safe on the outside, and hurried away through the darkness to the edge of the town.

There he stopped at a small cottage home and rapped.

The door was opened and a man appeared. "It is you, sir, and, after all, you escaped?" "Yes, so get my horse and let me be off, for I need all the start I can get."

Ten minutes after he was mounted on a fine horse, and dressed in wholly different clothes, was dashing swiftly along a country road.

When dawn broke and the light streamed into his cell, Steve Lucas made the discovery that he was gone, and half an hour after, in spite of his injuries, Jailer Price was at his post, and the alarm spread.

But the letter explained all, and no one thought of blaming or suspecting the guard, while Jailer Price, in disgust, resigned his place as keeper, having come to the conclusion that he was not the man to keep a jail.

CHAPTER XLVII.

AFTER THE ESCAPE.

THE first intimation that Eleanor Graydon had of the escape of her lover was a letter from her brother Gaston to her father.

It was dated at the town, just after the escape of Harold Argyle was discovered, and was hastily written.

It said:

"MY DEAR FATHER:—

"Harold Argyle escaped from jail last night in a most mysterious manner.

"He was gone hours before the discovery was made and I fear is beyond pursuit, but rewards are offered, and hundreds of people are in search of him.

"I also leave on the hunt.

"Will notify you.

"Yours affectionately,

"GASTON."

Eleanor was summoned to her father when he got this letter and he read it to her.

She could hardly suppress cries of delight and said nothing, for fear she would betray herself.

"This is horrible! horrible!" said Colonel Graydon.

But Eleanor said not a word and soon after escaped to her room.

Seizing pen, ink and paper she wrote:

"Harold has escaped and his safety is assured.

"Will write more fully when I get tidings which I know will come to me."

Then Eleanor threw on her hat and started out for a walk.

Her way led straight to the Indian camp.

Potomac had just come in from a hunt, and had a deer slung over the back of his pony.

"Potomac, mount your best horse and ride like the wind to give this note to Mr. Argyle."

"Me go quick."

"Here," and he got a twenty-dollar note to aid in quickening his pace.

When he drew up at the door of Valley Vista mansion his horse had been ridden hard.

Mr. Argyle was upon the piazza, walking to and fro.

He saw the coming of the Indian with anxiety in his face, for did he bring him good or bad news?

Then he read the letter, and tears of joy rolled down his cheeks.

"Potomac, God bless you!" was all he said.

Then he went to his library and returned with a purse of gold which Potomac was the recipient of.

"Hector will give you some dinner and a fresh horse, if you must go right back."

"Go right back," said Potomac, for he wanted a fresh horse, as he had an idea he would be a good one.

When he started he was as well mounted as when he came, and carried a letter to Eleanor.

He had just ridden out of the plantation gate when he saw some horsemen approaching.

They were three in number and were officers of the law, on their way to search the mansion for Harold Argyle.

The old gentleman received them politely, feigned surprise at the news they brought, and told them to make a thorough search.

They did so, and then pretended to leave: but instead went away to watch the place for the coming of the fugitive from justice.

In the mean time Potomac returned to his camp, and there the next morning Eleanor came and received her letter.

It told of the joy of the old man, and that he owed it to her that Harold had escaped.

The next day the papers arrived containing an account of the daring rescue.

It gave a full statement, which Eleanor eagerly read to her father, of the arrival of the bogus priest, how he had deceived Father St. Joseph, and all, and then sacrificed his liberty to save the prisoner from the gallows.

What would be done with the rescuer no one could tell.

It was certain that Harold Argyle had escaped the gallows, and so thoroughly and well had the whole affair been arranged that not the slightest clue could be found as to where the prisoner had gone.

Nor could any accomplice be found of the man who had remained in his stead.

What was still more mysterious, the paper

went on to state that not a soul knew aught about the daring rescuer.

He was described, and then it stated that he simply gave the name of John Smith.

He was still in prison and would doubtless be severely dealt with as far as imprisonment went.

Now who was this man who had remained in prison while Harold Argyle fled, Eleanor asked herself.

She read the description over.

A tall, well-formed man with close-cut hair, smoothly shaven face that was dark, and determined in expression.

"That certainly is not Duncan Chatard," she said.

"Yet I am surprised even with death staring him in the face, that Harold Argyle should have escaped and left a man in his place to suffer, though of course the suffering can only be from imprisonment."

The more she mused over the matter the more she was mystified.

One thing was certain and that was that Harold Argyle had escaped the gallows, for certainly he had not been retaken, and, with the start he had had he was not one to be readily caught.

She had not heard from Duncan Chatard so awaited patiently for the word from him.

The escape of Argyle she could trace to him, only who could be this man who had been willing to remain in prison.

Then some of the people from down about Valley Vista stopped at Graydon Grange for the night, and they said that the Argyle Plantation was under the eye of officers of the law, who had also made a thorough search of the mansion, thinking the fugitive would go there.

This was a warning to Eleanor not to send Potomac there again, as he might be suspected, arrested, and her letter found upon him.

The next day Gaston Graydon returned home.

He was decidedly in an ill-humor, and told the story of the escape of his foe in no pleasant terms.

Eleanor was silent, for she had nothing to say, but listened to all she heard.

"If I could capture that fellow, I'd be a very happy man.

"As it is, I can only hope to meet him some day, and when I do, it shall be his life or mine.

"Why, I'd be content to let him escape the gallows to fight a duel with him, and your splendid friend the duelist, Eleanor, should be my second.

"By the way, when did you hear from him?"

"You remember his sending us the presents," was Eleanor's evasive reply, and Gaston went on to say:

"I visited that fellow in jail, and it seemed to me I had seen him before."

"What fellow, brother?"

"Why, that infernal rescuer of Argyle, of course."

"You know him?"

"No, I could not place him, and I was in a hurry to be off after Argyle.

"He seemed to avoid my eye, too, and held his head down when I looked at him; but I'll see him when I go back, and all that the law can give him he shall have, I promise you, for Gardner would have been avenged before this, but for him."

It was decidedly evident that Gaston Graydon was very much incensed at the escape of Harold Argyle, and Eleanor was correspondingly delighted.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE DUELIST'S LETTER.

SEVERAL days after the return home of Gaston Graydon, the mail arrived while Colonel Graydon, his son and daughter were breakfasting together.

Gaston broke the seal of one of two letters he had from his attorneys, and he muttered something very like an imprecation, after which he said:

"The murderer is still at large."

"Not taken yet, my son?" asked his father, with an air of dejection.

"No, sir, and they say there is no hope for it."

"Any news about the wretch who rescued him?"

"He is in jail, awaiting trial for his crime, sir."

"They know nothing about him, as to what his real name is, or anything else, brother?"

"Not a word."

"Perhaps your other letter is later news, though they both came in the same mail," Eleanor suggested.

Gaston hastily broke the seal of this second letter from his attorney.

He read a few lines, turned pale, and an oath broke from his lips in denunciation of some one.

Colonel Graydon, in his invalid state, was positively startled.

It was seldom that Gaston seemed thus moved.

"What is it, Gaston?" asked his sister, deeply anxious to learn, but controlling herself wonderfully well.

"He has escaped, too."

"Who?"

"That devilish rescuer."

"John Smith?" asked Eleanor, scarcely able to hide her joy.

"John Smith, be—"

"Oh, brother!"

"Yes, the scamp has escaped, and did it in the coolest manner possible.

"Listen to what Hilton & Lester have to say:

"The prisoner was searched thoroughly, as it was supposed when he was taken to the other cell, and nothing found upon him, except a ribbon around his neck with a small cross to it.

"No one thought of looking on his back, and there, suspended to the ribbon, so as to fit snugly in between his shoulder-blades, the man had a pad.

"In that pad were files, a small rope and keys.

"The jailer was run away with by his team, two days before, and one of the night watch was with him, and both badly hurt, so they went to their homes, leaving the jail short-handed.

"This, we suppose the prisoner knew, and he took advantage of Steve Lucas's doing double duty, watched his chance, unlocked his door and thus made his way out of the prison unseen.

"He left his key in the gate lock, as a souvenir to Jailer Price, the files and line hanging to it, and a note telling how he had made his escape.

"It was eleven o'clock P. M., when he left, and six A. M. when his escape was discovered, so that he had seven hours' start.

"Like Argyle, he left not the shadow of a trace by which to follow him, and whether he went north, south, east or west no one knows.

"Of course the whole country is on the lookout for him, but we have no hope that such a man can be found, and Jailer Price has resigned in utter disgust.

"Thus ends the Argyle trial and what followed, for we give no hope of ever capturing the prisoners."

Such was the letter, and the newspapers received by the same mail gave a full account of the remarkable escape of the mysterious prisoner.

Eleanor made no comment.

She dared not trust herself to do so.

But she put on her sun-hat and went out for a walk, that she might be alone and give her thoughts full rein.

She had reached the main entrance of the grounds, and had just taken a seat on the bench by the massive gateway, when she saw a vehicle approaching.

It was a spring-cart, and carried two persons.

They were both negroes, and as they drew nearer, Eleanor saw that the wagon was a hired one from the farm six miles distant, and in one of the negroes she recognized Vim, the valet of Duncan Chatard.

Her heart beat so she felt as though she would swoon, for now she would know all, and perhaps was to learn that Harold Argyle had been retaken.

But seeing her Vim sprung from the wagon, raised his hat and advanced toward her.

"I just came to see you, Missy Eleanor, for I have letters for you and your father," and he handed her a sealed package for herself, and a smaller one for her father.

"Vim, I am very glad you have come, and hope you bring only good news."

"I do, missy."

"Where is your master?"

"In Baltimore, missy."

"Well, Vim, I will sit here and read my letter, while you go on to the house and carry this one to my father."

"You do not wish to go right back, do you?"

"When you are ready to send me back, missy, for this man will wait for me."

"Very well, you can both of you get some breakfast, and I will come to the house soon."

The wagon drove on and Eleanor read her letter.

It was dated at Baltimore, and the contents were as follows:

"MY DEAR MISS GRAYDON:—I write to-day, sending the letter with this one to you, asking your father's permission to lay my heart, hand and fortune at your feet.

"If I receive his consent you may expect me, before many days to come and plead my case before you in person.

"With sincere regard,

"DUNCAN CHATARD."

This was written upon one sheet of paper, and Eleanor saw that it was intended for her father's eyes.

Then followed another letter, and this she most eagerly read.

That letter was as follows:

"MY DEAR MISS ELEANOR:—Do you know that I have won my prize, that I have kept my pledge to you?"

"I suppose ere this you have discovered that I accomplished the purpose for which I left you."

"In other words Harold Argyle is a free man and I was unable before this to send you the tidings which I know would cause you to rejoice."

"It was in this way.

"After my other failure, which you know of, I could find but one way to free him."

"That was by strategy of the most cunning kind."

"In studying to rescue him I had discovered that he had had in his boyhood an old Catholic priest as a tutor."

"That man, Father Romano was dead; but I decided to impersonate him and thanks to my thorough knowledge of the Catholic services in Latin, I was enabled to carry it out to success."

"I had to cut off my mustache and hair, get me a wig that was snowy white and darken up my face, and thus, with priestly robe and hat on I was hard to recognize as Duncan Chatard.

"Your brother rode in the same stage with me and did not know me.

"Well, to shorten my story, I played the part to success, met your friend in prison, became his spiritual adviser, as was believed, and laid my plan before him.

"He knew me only as one under somebody's pay to aid him, and refused to leave me in prison to suffer while he escaped.

"But I told him that I took the chances for the reward I would receive when I got out, and he yielded on that basis.

"All was arranged for him, so that there would be no mistake, and he walked boldly out of the prison and is now at sea on his way to Cuba.

"As for myself, I went prepared to escape, if in my power to do so, and I was successful in my first effort, as this letter proves, for I am now writing you from a hotel in Baltimore.

"I send Vim from here with this letter, to relieve your mind, and give him the letter I referred to to your father.

"Your brother saw me again in prison, and I saw that he was trying hard to remember me; but he did not connect Duncan Chatard with the rescuer of his foe.

"From here I go to my home in New Orleans, as soon as Vim returns, for I dare not appear before you all until my hair and mustache are restored to what they were as you knew me, for your brother would surely recognize me as Father Romano.

"I will hope for a favorable answer from your father, and trust sincerely that you will not regret that we ever met and Planter Bernard bound us together as man and wife.

"You are very dear to me, Eleanor, and all I did was for your sweet sake, so I would be deeply pained did I feel that I could not win your love.

"The one who won your heart is gone, and the one to whom I gave my first love is alike beyond my reach.

"Let us then, knowing each other as we do, live for our mutual happiness.

"I at least will hope that it may be so.

"Write me by Vim, and if your letter is all that I hope it will be, then I will look upon you as pledged to me by your own sweet will, and that you will, when I return to you, be willing to ratify the vows you once spoke in mockery, as you believed."

Such was the letter, and when it was finished, Eleanor went slowly back to the mansion, where she found her father and brother quite elated over the letter received by the colonel from the duelist.

"How little do they suspect the truth," she murmured, as she went to her room to answer Duncan Chatard's letter as he wished, and to thank him for so nobly keeping his pledge to her.

"And so he was this mysterious prisoner, John Smith, was he?"

"Well, he is a marvelous man, and if I do not learn to love him then I have no heart."

CHAPTER XLIX.

SAVED BY A DESTROYER.

A MONTH after the reception of Duncan Chatard's letter by Eleanor Graydon, a carriage was driving down one of the streets of New Orleans leading to the levee.

A negro coachman was upon the box, and the horses were a very stylish, spirited pair of animals.

The carriage was closed, but within a glimpse was had of a gentleman and lady.

The latter was wondrously beautiful, but a sad look rested upon her lovely face, and upon it also was an expression of anxiety as she gazed toward her companion.

He was leaning back in the carriage, propped up by cushions and was evidently an invalid, for his face was very pale and haggard.

As the vehicle drew near the levee some builders were tearing down an old brick house, when suddenly the wall fell outward with a terrific crash.

The dust rolled in clouds into the faces of the horses, blinded the driver and pieces of bricks striking the animals they bounded away with a sudden lurch that threw the negro coachman from the box.

With no restraint the maddened animals flew directly toward the river.

They ran straight as an arrow flies, and half-blinded with dust and wild with fright they dashed down toward a wharf that jutted out just there into the river.

The current surged along there at a very rapid rate, and the river was very deep, so that death stared the occupants of the vehicle in the face.

The invalid was unable to spring out, and the lady would not leave him.

An up-river steamer had just landed near, and some of the passengers had hastened ashore.

Among these was a gentleman whose eyes fell upon the runaway team.

While others stood in dumb awe he acted, and did it quickly.

He ran like a deer directly across the course of the runaways, and grasped the bit of one of the animals.

He was dragged along for some distance, but he bravely held on, and a man of giant strength he dragged the horses back upon their haunches just as a few more bounds would have plunged all into the river.

A yell of admiration rung out from all who

witnessed the brave deed, and the carriage-door opened as the lady stepped out.

Others had now arrived upon the scene, and the coachman, having caught a cab, came driving up.

"Where is the one who so nobly risked his life to save us from death?" said the lady, her face pale, her lips quivering, for she had known her danger, and now realized that she was safe.

All looked about for the stranger, and one cried:

"Why, there he goes!"

He was retreating rapidly back to the boat, from which a traveling carriage had just been driven ashore, while a negro followed on horseback.

One look at the retreating form and the lady gave a cry, covered her face with her hands and almost tottered back to the carriage.

The invalid had not moved, but smiled as she returned, and entering the vehicle the lady called out to the coachman:

"Drive home, Brooks."

The coachman was again upon his box, and the horses having been mastered, were perfectly quiet, so went off in a very different manner from that which they had come to the spot in.

"Where is the brave man, Irene?" asked the gentleman.

"Gone."

"Gone! and you did not thank him?"

"Why, tell Brooks to overtake him, and if he is needy we can help him, for he saved our lives, Irene."

"Alas! I know it."

"Why do you speak as though you were sorry?"

"No, no, I did not mean that, Claude."

"Perhaps he is a gentleman, and we can only thank him."

"I saw him, but indistinctly as I ran and caught the horses and struggled so manfully with them."

"Claude, he is one that does not need aid," impressively said Irene.

"Why, you know him then?"

"I know him as Duncan Chatard, the duelist."

"Was it he?" and the pale face of the soldier became livid.

"Yes, it was to Duncan Chatard that we owe an escape from a fearful death."

"We do, indeed; but you are certain it was he?"

"Sure."

"He is away."

"He has just returned, for he came off the down-river boat that had just landed, and his traveling carriage followed him ashore."

"He did not know us, I hope."

"He did, for I am sure that he recognized the carriage, and he saw us, for why else would he have so quickly hastened away?"

"True, and we owe our lives to him," said the soldier sadly.

"Yes, to Duncan Chatard, the duelist."

"Well, my life is ebbing away, Irene, and I cannot live very long, I feel, and his is the hand that brought me where I am."

"But I thank him, Irene, I thank Duncan Chatard that he has saved me but now, that I may be yet a little longer with you whom I so dearly love."

"And, my wife, far more do I thank him for saving you from death, for life is before you, a long live, and mayhap a joyous one after I have gone."

Irene made no reply, and soon after the carriage reached the Girard Mansion, where the young soldier and his wife were stopping.

Though he had gotten well enough to move about the house, and be driven out, Claude Scofield was by no means a well man, and the doctors gave him little hope of ultimate recovery.

The wound had drained his system of its vitality, and the slightest overexertion might cause his death.

In fact, no one now believed that he would ever get well.

Two servants aided the wounded man from the carriage to the library, and then he sat for a long while in silence.

Madam Girard was told by Irene of their rescue, and who had been the rescuer, and that good lady bit her lips with vexation.

"Even for good must that man come before us?" she muttered to herself.

Claude Scofield was more deeply impressed with what had happened than he cared to admit.

If he died of his wound, then it was the hand of Duncan Chatard that had killed him.

But that day his life, and that of one dearer than all else to him, had been saved by the duelist.

He knew who was their preserver, so he could not ignore the fact.

He must acknowledge the double debt of gratitude.

"Ah, my wife, had I known that I was chaining you to a wreck, never would I have asked you to marry me."

"But I expected to die then, and if I had hope of recovery it was that I would be my old self once more."

"But see me now, a shadow of my former

self, and one from whom life is slowly slipping away."

"Do not talk thus, Claude, for you may yet recover," said Irene, softly, but she knew as she spoke that it could not be.

"Well, Irene, in my suffering torture of body, I yet have had happiness of mind, for no shadow has come between us," he said, musingly.

"No shadow," and Irene turned away.

"No shadow," but she thought the words, but did not speak them.

"Ah! did he but know all, did he but know that I love the hand that has stricken me!"

"Did he but know the deep shadow in my heart, while has he not a secret from me?"

"Has he ever spoken of Helene, of the original of that miniature he now has hidden away?"

"Ah me! there are shadows in the lives of us all, and mine is but the burying-ground of shattered lives."

CHAPTER L.

MRS. SCOFIELD WRITES A LETTER.

THE New Orleans papers the morning after the runaway of the Girard team, came out with a description of the affair that was most thrilling, and went on to state that some bold man had risked his life to rescue the occupants of the carriage from death.

Who had done so no one seemed to know, for the gallant stranger had quickly disappeared in the crowd, and thus had seemed to hide from the notoriety his brave act would bring him into.

But when Irene Scofield read this she knew but too well who was the daring man.

The world might be in ignorance of the fact that the slayer of her brother and her father, the man who had wounded her brother Rupert but spared his life, the man whose hand had brought her husband to the wreck he was, had atoned in part for the past by saving her life and Claude Scofield's.

Could she allow this to pass unnoticed by her?

Did she not know that he, Duncan Chatard, was aware that she had recognized him?

She would not let him believe that she was heartless, and so she sat down and wrote to the duelist.

It was a hard letter for her to write, but she finished it at last and sent it to the home of the duelist.

What she wrote was:

"Do not misunderstand my writing you; but consider my motive a womanly one."

"I would not have you believe me heartless, or thankful for the lives you have saved."

"A short while more, I fear, and one life must end, and yours the hand that places the seal of death upon a young and brilliant existence as was promised to him."

"He is my husband and so I thank you for sparing him yet awhile that I may brighten a few more weeks of his life."

"For my life I must thank you, and yet had it not been better to let me find rest in death from what is but a cruel existence after all."

"You risked your own life to save ours, and will not that atone for at least two sins of your past?"

"God grant it to be so."

"One word more, and I have written my last word to you."

"My brother considers that the death of our father at your hand cancels the act of sparing his life."

"He gazes upon my husband's sufferings and becomes revengeful, and he will call you out to face him, to add another victim to this red vendetta."

"May I, as upon bended knees before you, with hands upraised in pleading, implore you to spare his life?"

"Will you heed, and know that when my husband is taken from me I will go to a convent, and there, daily and nightly, offer up prayers for your soul?"

"I have faith that you will."

"Forever farewell, IRENE SCOFIELD."

This letter the duelist received as he sat at breakfast in his elegant home the second morning after his arrival in the city.

He had just finished his breakfast, and started as he recognized the writing.

Rising, he went to his library and began to pace the floor.

It was a long while before he opened it, for, cool, brave man that he was, he seemed to lack courage to read what was written within that scented envelope.

At last he broke the seal and read it through.

His face darkened, and his lips were set.

"Great God! this act of hers brings all back to me once more."

For a long time he sat musing deeply.

Then, as a relief from his thoughts, he turned to a bundle of papers that lay at his elbow.

He picked up one mechanically, and read:

"The return of Mr. Duncan Chatard to his home two days ago from a visit to the North by means of his own traveling conveyance recalls the fact that Captain Claude Scofield still is in a precarious condition from the wound received in the duel with the noted duelist."

"It also recalls the many affairs of honor in which Mr. Chatard has been engaged, and it is to his credit that he has not been the instigator in this deadly way of settling quarrels."

"It has been whispered about town that upon the return of Mr. Chatard, Mr. Rupert Sheldon of Bay St. Louis, intended to call him out again, to thus keep up the vendetta that has existed between

the two families for generations, and also to avenge the death of his brother and father at his hands.

"We trust that Mr. Sheldon will reconsider such a determination on his part, if he has so decided, for these affairs of honor are certainly becoming too frequent and the law must soon take cognizance of the fact and put a stop to them in some way."

"We welcome Mr. Chatard home again."

The duelist smiled bitterly as he read this.

"Well, I am sorry, very sorry, for that poor fellow's sufferings, and yet he stole from me my intended wife, and he shot to kill me too."

"Better had he died at once, than linger thus to suffer."

"Of course, if Rupert Sheldon calls me out I must go."

"Now to run up to Orangelands for a visit of a day or two."

He arose to make his preparations to take that afternoon boat up the river, when the butler came in to announce a visitor.

The duelist took the card in an indifferent manner, with the remark:

"I suppose it is some one with a challenge."

But he started when he read the name and said:

"Show him in at once."

CHAPTER LI

AN UNLOOKED FOR ARRIVAL.

THE visitor who entered the room was none other than Gaston Graydon.

He had arrived in the city that morning on an up-river boat, gone to the hotel for breakfast and then called upon the duelist whom he so much admired.

Duncan Chatard was a little startled at first.

Why had he come? Had he discovered that he was the rescuer of Harold Argyle?

Had he found out that he had been the pretended Father Romano?

He sincerely hoped not.

There was no man on earth that Duncan Chatard feared; but he did not wish a quarrel with the brother of Eleanor Graydon.

It could end but one way, he thought.

He glanced hastily at himself in the large mirror over the mantle.

Two months had passed since he had impersonated Father Romano.

In that time his mustache and hair had grown out to almost their former length.

Of course Gaston Graydon had him to remember, as he had never seen him at Graydon Grange, again in the stage-coach as the priest, and again in the gloomy cell after the flight of Harold Argyle.

Would he not be so mixed on the three separate times, as not to be able to recognize in the duelist those whom he had thus seen?

Duncan Chatard thought so, hoped so, and met the visitor coolly.

The first glance showed him that Gaston Graydon did not suspect him.

He stepped forward and welcomed him warmly, while he asked:

"What good wind wafts you here, Graydon?"

"I will tell you."

"It was to try and find Harold Argyle here."

"I got a rumor that he had fled to New Orleans, and so I determined to try and find him, and came for that purpose."

"The truth is, Mr. Chatard, I really don't care to see the fellow hang, and yet my brother must be avenged."

"The Virginia vendetta between the Argyles and Graydons must never die out until there is no more material."

"So, if I found Argyle, I wanted to call him out, ask you to second me, and kill him."

"If he kills me that settles it for him at least, and in either case we have both done our best."

"Well, I will put the officers on the watch for you, and in the mean time you are to be my guest."

"No, no, I—"

"Yes, yes, for I will not hear you say no, and if you refuse I will call you out, and you know I am a dead-shot."

"I will send to your hotel for your traps, for I have an old house here with thirty rooms in it, and myself and servants all there are to occupy it, so here you come."

Thus urged, Gaston Graydon could not refuse, and his baggage was sent for.

Then the conversation turned upon Graydon Grange, and Gaston said:

"You got father's letter, Chatard, in answer to the one doing us the honor to ask for Eleanor's hand?"

"Yes, and thank him for his complimentary terms used therein."

"I consider it an honor to ask for Miss Graydon's hand, and, by the way, as I learn that you are heart whole and fancy free, I shall see that you find a lady-love here among our beautiful girls, nearly all of whom, by the way, are heiresses."

"I had never thought of marrying."

"Well, you'll think of it here, without doubt, and I shall take you with me up to Orangelands to-night, for Mr. Bernard and his daughter will seem like old friends to you, having been so friendly with your sister, and it is like my second home."

"Then, if you don't fall in love with the fair

Mademoiselle Anita, you are not the man I take you for."

"I shall not try to, at least, but will be most happy to go there, and Eleanor would never forgive me did I not."

"Then we will run up to-night, but only for a short stop, for I will have to be in the city again, as I am expecting a communication as soon as my return home is known to the party."

"Ah! an affair?"

"Yes, one of long standing, for it is one of my vendetta friends, and—"

"Remember I am at your service, Chatard."

"Thank you, but it would hardly be fair, as you are a stranger here, and my guest."

"It would be perfectly fair, and I would like to go out with you, for I have an idea you finish a man in the neatest manner possible."

"Thank you, and consider yourself engaged, then, for any affairs that may be forced upon me, for I never myself seek trouble if it can be avoided."

"But, by the way, did you ever learn if that bogus priest was retaken?"

"He never was, and now let me tell you what puzzled me sorely?"

"Yes?"

"It was where I had seen the man before, and now I know that I did not, only it was his resemblance to you that haunted me."

"His resemblance to me—a priest?" and Duncan Chatard laughed as though he enjoyed the joke.

"Yes, he had features like you, and that is where his face puzzled me, making me think I had seen him before."

"You never heard more of him?"

"Not a word, the clever rascal; but I did hear from one of the officers that he thought that Harold Argyle had come to New Orleans, and so it was that I came, hoping to find him here, and I sincerely hope that I shall."

That afternoon the duelist took his friend out for a drive, and afterward they visited several social clubs together.

Gaston Graydon was certainly a most striking-looking man.

He had all the dark and manly beauty of his dead brother, Gardner, without any of the evil temper and marks of dissipation.

He was a typical Virginian, his manners were frank and courteous, and few would see and not admire him, while to know him was to like him.

The two men, the duelist and the Virginian, made a splendid-looking pair together, and so all remarked who saw them together.

That evening they went on board the steamer going up the river, and were set down at Orangelands soon after nightfall.

CHAPTER LII.

COME TO FIGHT.

AFTER the departure of Duncan Chatard for the North, Pierre Bernard became quite lost, as he expressed it.

He had no idea how much he was attached to the duelist until he had departed where he could not see him every day or so.

Anita too began to analyze her heart, and she sighed as she felt that the duelist was very dear to her, had a warmer place in her regard than she could wish, for he was a man whom she would dread to love.

As Anita and her father sat on the piazza, enjoying the beauty of the moonlit night, the planter said:

"There comes a steamer, and she heads in toward our shore."

"Any freight to be put off, father?"

"I have ordered nothing."

"Some visitor, then?"

As Anita spoke, the distant whistle of the steamer was heard blowing for a landing.

"Let us walk down to the landing, my child?"

Together they walked down the gravel way, and reached there just as the steamer was backing off to continue on up the river.

But three persons had landed, and were coming toward them.

One of these was Vim, the negro valet of the duelist, and he carried in each hand a sachel.

In front of him were Duncan Chatard and Gaston Graydon.

The bright moonlight revealed to the planter and his daughter who one of their visitors was, at least.

"Chatard, my dear boy, I am delighted to see you."

"Welcome back!"

And the planter grasped the hand of the duelist.

"And I give you welcome, Mr. Chatard," said Anita.

"And I have a friend for you to welcome—the brother of one whom you both dearly love—Mr. Gaston Graydon, of Virginia."

Then Gaston's welcome showed him that the duelist had not spoken too warmly in praise of his sister's friends and their hospitality, for he was made to feel at home at once.

Gaston Graydon offered his arm to Anita on the way back to the mansion, while the planter

and the duelist followed side by side, and a servant from the house, who had come down to the landing to make himself useful, followed with Vim.

It was a delightful evening there at Orangelands, and long after midnight before they retired.

When at last Anita went to her room, she began to think a great deal of Gaston Graydon.

Was he engaged, she wondered?

Then she thought how handsome he was, and what a superb form!

His voice was so musical, and he sung love songs with such an earnest air as to be irresistible.

Then he was so like his sister Eleanor, and Anita loved her so dearly.

The truth was Anita began to feel that, though she loved the duelist not a whit the less, was not Gaston Graydon a man whom she could love more?

Was not, in fact, her love for Duncan Chatard more like what she would feel toward a brother?

The next morning breakfast had been set for nine o'clock, but Anita had promised to take half an hour's gallop before the meal with Gaston Graydon.

So it was a little after eight when they dashed away.

"How superbly he rides!" thought Anita, as she saw her escort mount.

And when they came back, just as breakfast was announced, Gaston Graydon felt that he would never have to be called out by the duelist for not falling in love with Anita Bernard, for he whispered to his friend:

"You are right, for I am in love with her already, and sister predicted it should I ever see her."

"What a superb country this is, so balmy, dreamy and all so beautiful."

The guests were readily prevailed upon to remain several days, and all seemed perfectly happy, even the stern, sad face of the duelist lighting up under the influences around him.

There were rides, drives, rows on the river in a barge with a dozen sable oarsmen, and entertainments among the hospitable neighbors.

But the while there was an influence for evil working elsewhere.

At Gulf View, Rupert Sheldon had lived alone with only his slaves about him, since the death of his father and the marriage of his sister.

His wound had wholly recovered, but the continued suffering of Claude Scofield caused him to brood in gloomy silence.

Duncan Chatard had gone away.

But only for a while, and when he returned then would he demand of him a life for a life.

Each morning did the young planter rise early and practice with his pistols.

He shot in the sunlight, in the rain and at twilight, so as to accustom him to any phase of weather.

He had his confidential servant give him the word as on a dueling-field, and morning, noon and night he practiced.

He was practicing to kill.

And so it was that at last he never missed.

His aim was sure, and shot after shot he would put in a space the size of half a dollar until he grew tired of the sameness of his aim.

One morning he sat on his piazza enjoying the superb view.

The waters lay like a mirror before him, with Cat Island in the distance, Pass Christian across the Bay St. Louis in front of him, and to the right the blue Gulf of Mexico.

Across the shore upon which he dwelt the sands ran like a silver belt girdling the earth, with a dark background of magnolias and live-oak trees.

Here and there was a planter's village along the shore, and further up the bay was the village of St. Louis, with its little church spire rising above the tree-tops.

It was a tranquil scene, and it had its influence upon the young planter, for his face was calm and restful.

Then into the gateway came a negro on horseback, and dashing up to the door he dismounted and gave to his master the mail-bag.

There were several letters, and papers.

The former were on business excepting one.

That one was from his sister, Irene Scofield.

His face darkened as he read it, and his eyes burned with a savage, vicious light.

Crumpling the letter in his clinched fist, he threw it aside.

It told him of the return of the duelist, and that to him Claude Scofield and himself owed their lives.

It begged, beseeched him to let the vendetta rest as it was.

Then he took up the paper and read the notice which the reader has seen.

He arose after this, called to a servant and said:

"Have my yacht ready to sail within the hour, for I go to New Orleans."

"Yes, massa," and the order was given to the sable crew of the pretty yacht.

Two hours after she was standing out of the bay and heading along the coast to run through

the Rigoletts to an anchorage in the lake not far from New Orleans.

The next day saw the arrival of the young planter at the hotel in the city.

He did not go to Madam Girard's, but sat down and wrote a note to a friend, asking him to come to see him.

That friend was Octave Fairix, the man who had seconded his brother and his father in their duels with Duncan Chatard.

Octave Fairix soon arrived, and Rupert Sheldon said to him, as he grasped his hand:

"Chatard has returned and I am here to fight."

CHAPTER LIII.

A CHALLENGER.

ABOUT noon on the third day of their stay at Orangelands, Gaston Graydon and the duelist were seated out upon the piazza smoking, the planter having been called off on the plantation, and Anita having an eye to her housekeeping arrangements.

"I must return to the city to-night, Gaston, for I do not wish to appear to be away for a purpose, should I be sought after."

"Well, of course I will accompany you, Chatard, and after a week's stay we will run up again."

"I told you that you would lose your heart to Anita, and my advice to you is to win her and carry her back to Virginia with you."

"Egad, I'll gladly do so if I can; but there comes a carriage along the highway, and it is turning in here."

The carriage came on up to the door, and the moment that the duelist saw who it was that alighted, he knew his mission.

But his face did not change color, as he rose and greeted the visitor.

"Ah, Mr. Fairix, we meet again, and at Orangelands."

"My friend, Mr. Gaston Graydon, of Virginia, Mr. Fairix."

The two gentlemen shook hands, and Fairix said:

"I saw a notice in the paper that Mr. Graydon, of Virginia, was visiting you, and I am glad to meet you, sir."

Gaston Graydon bowed his thanks, and the duelist said:

"Mr. Bernard is upon his plantation, and Miss Bernard looking after household affairs, Mr. Fairix, so permit me to serve as host, and let me send your carriage to the stables, for of course you will remain to dinner?"

"Thank you, but I cannot stay. I must return to Mr. Lamont's to dine, for he is an old friend, and meeting me on my way up from the city, begged me to do so."

"I am sorry; but I suppose you have come here to visit me?"

"Yes, and I regret exceedingly that such is the case; but I am compelled to serve my friend, Rupert Sheldon."

"Ah, yes, and he will find a true friend in you, Fairix."

"Mr. Sheldon begs to say that he fully appreciated your having spared his life, and the vendetta between you would never have been pressed by him, after such kindness on your part, had not your act been canceled by the subsequent duel in which Doctor Sheldon lost his life at your hands."

"He is kind to appreciate my first act."

"Feeling that as his father fell before you, the vendetta has been again pressed on your part, he begs me to see you and request a meeting, with pistols, for his arm is not well enough to enable him to indulge in sword-practice."

"Why, certainly, Mr. Fairix, and pistols, or swords are all the same to me; but I would have preferred the latter weapons, as they would have enabled me again to offer Mr. Sheldon his life."

"As it is, you know, bullets have a bad way of finding a mark," and the duelist smiled, as he raised the curl that hid the bullet scar on his forehead made by Claude Scofield.

"Yes, for Captain Scofield is still a fearful sufferer from his wound."

"So I have heard, and with much regret, for it had been better had he died on the field than to linger as he has and eventually die from his wound, as I hear he must," and the duelist spoke as though discussing an affair in which he was not in the slightest degree concerned.

Then he turned to his visitor and said:

"Not to detain you, Mr. Fairix, let me refer you to my friend, Mr. Graydon, who has had some experience in these sad affairs himself."

Octave Fairix bowed, and the preliminaries were quickly arranged, the weapons being pistols, the place the grove above the city where Doctor Sheldon had lost his life, and the time at sunset on the following day.

"And now, a glass of wine together, Mr. Fairix," said the duelist, and the gentlemen adjourned to the massive sideboard and drank each other's health, after which the visitor departed.

But Anita had caught sight of him, and well she knew why he had come.

A boat was expected down about dark, and until it arrived the duelist had never seemed in a better humor.

He told the planter of the challenge, and then dismissed it, after which he was most entertaining, as well he knew how to be.

The planter and Anita walked down to the landing with their guests, and tears were in the beautiful eyes of the maiden as she grasped the hand of the duelist in farewell.

"This is the last, is it not, for it must be?" she said.

"I hope so, for Heaven knows I like not to stain my hand and conscience with human life," was the reply of the duelist, and then they parted, the two friends going on board the steamer.

It was late when they reached the city, but they were driving to the Chatard Mansion, when after a supper which they both enjoyed, they sought their respective rooms.

"Breakfast at ten, Gaston," said the duelist pleasantly, as they bade each other good-night.

The next morning they met, and the duelist seemed in the same cheery mood as upon the night before.

They had breakfast, then looked over the pistols to be used, after which Duncan Chatard wrote a number of letters, added a codicil to his will, for he always prepared for death as a certainty, no matter what he might feel as to his chances for living, and then the two went out to dine.

They dropped in at the Clubs and had a late lunch, after which, looking at his watch, the duelist said, as the two sat around a circle of friends:

"Remember our engagement, Graydon, as it is time we were going if we wish to keep it promptly."

"I'll warrant there is a duel on hand, for Duncan Chatard always seems cheerful before such affairs, and I never saw him in better humor than he is to-day," said one of the club men, and the others seemed to be of the same opinion, for one remarked:

"A thousand to a hundred that he kills his man."

"I take the bet, Godive, for luck cannot always stick to one man," said another.

"And I'll wager even money that Rupert Sheldon has been the one to call him out," another remarked.

Thus were bets made upon the duel that was to be fought at sunset.

CHAPTER LIV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR RESULT.

THE birds chirped merrily in the grove at the river-bank, until the coming of a carriage, from which dismounted two gentlemen, startled them into a remembrance that there had been such visitors before, and they flew to seek a retreat further away among the live-oaks.

"First in the field," said Gaston Graydon, as he saw that there were no others present.

"I always am," was the laconic response of the duelist.

But they had not long to wait before another carriage appeared.

It was a hack from the hotel, and in it were three persons.

One was Rupert Sheldon, and he was accompanied by Octave Fairix and a gentleman in black whom the duelist recognized as a distinguished surgeon.

He smiled, and said:

"Sheldon has brought a surgeon."

But he did not know that Octave Fairix had only consented to act for him upon condition that he would bring a surgeon.

The doctor was a pompous, business-like looking little man, bowed to the duelist, was introduced to the Virginian, and said, pleasantly:

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Graydon, even under such circumstances, for I am a Virginian myself, and when your mother was a girl, loved her, sir; but your father cut me out, and I have never married."

"We must be friends, sir, friends."

The seconds now began their ominous arrangements, while Rupert Sheldon, pale, stern, and silent, paced to and fro, his face bent down.

He had bowed to his adversary and his second on his arrival, and they had acknowledged it by raising their hats.

The doctor busied himself getting out his instruments and lint, and preparing for work if needed.

"No harm to be ready; but your master seldom makes work for the surgeon, though he certainly did when he fought Captain Scofield," said the surgeon, addressing Vim, the valet of the duelist.

The face of Duncan Chatard was a study.

He stood leaning against a tree, in a graceful, indolent manner, his eyes fixed upon the field of glory of Cloudland, which the sun near its horizon was forming into castles of gold, silver and bronze.

Not a muscle of his face moved,

What were in his thoughts no one could tell even by the closest study of his impassible countenance.

His face was serene now, rather grave than stern, and that he was not unmindful of what

was passing about him, he turned his eyes upon a red bird that had flown from across the river and lighted near him.

The bird of carmine plumage might be an omen of a red deed to be done.

He sat there on a twig, some twenty paces away, and with his head feathers ruffled gazed down at the scene near him.

The weapons were loaded, the principals called to their posts, and still the bird sat there facing the duelist, and now over the head of the planter.

The pistols were placed in the hands and Gaston Graydon had won the word.

The surgeon stood to one side, with folded arms, and behind him was Vim, anxious and scared face, while on the carriages some sixty yards away sat two coachmen.

Octave Fairix was a trifle nervous.

He had seen the brother and the father of Rupert Sheldon fall before the man who there stood ready to end the long vendetta by slaying the last of the Sheldons.

Gaston Graydon was perfectly cool and glanced from one to the other of the two men to note their bearing.

"Game, both of them, and that fellow in the face of the fact that Chatard killed his father and brother."

"And Chatard really looks noble in his grand courage."

"Well, all lies ready."

So mused the Virginian, and then his voice, clear, and with the ring of a soldier, was heard:

"Gentlemen, this duel is to be fought with one pistol loaded with a bullet."

"The other has a charge only of powder."

"You have drawn your weapons, and who has the loaded one no one knows."

"Are you ready?"

"Ready," promptly said both men.

"Fire! One—"

The pistol of Rupert Sheldon rose quickly and was fired when on a level and with a deliberate aim.

He seemed not to know that he was under fire.

But the duelist did not fall, nor did the red bird fly, though he gave a startled chirp.

Quick as a flash the pistol of the duelist was raised over the head of his adversary, the shot followed and the red bird, headless, fell at the feet of Rupert Sheldon.

"I had the loaded weapon," calmly said Duncan Chatard, as he tossed the pistol to his valet.

Rupert Sheldon's face turned to the hue of death.

At first he could not speak, but beckoned Octave Fairix to him.

"This will not do."

"I came here to kill or be killed."

"I demand another fire!"

"But Sheldon you cannot, after—"

"But I will, for if you will not second me, Fairix, I will get some one else and meet to-morrow."

"Let us settle this accursed vendetta here and now."

Octave Fairix was embarrassed.

That the duelist had the life of Rupert Sheldon at his mercy he had shown by cutting the head of the red bird off with his bullet.

But the duelist seemed to recognize his difficulty and relieved him.

"Graydon, Mr. Sheldon does not seem satisfied, so please say to Mr. Fairix that I will grant another fire with pleasure."

"This is all wrong, Chatard, for he does not deserve mercy if he asks it," Gaston Graydon said.

"Yes, Mr. Chatard has given him his life before this, and now does so again," the surgeon somewhat hotly said.

"Pray do as I ask you, Graydon."

Thus urged Gaston Graydon went to Octave Fairix and the two talked together for some time, while Rupert Sheldon paced up and down in angry mood.

At last Graydon returned and said:

"Mr. Sheldon says that he asks no mercy at your hands, and demands a second fire."

"I hope you granted it?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then please arrange, for night is near at hand."

In ten minutes more the duelists took their places.

This time both weapons were to be loaded with ball.

Duncan Chatard was as calmly serene as before, while the face of Rupert Sheldon was black with passion.

Still he was perfectly cool.

"Gentlemen, you are to fire between the words *fire* and *three*, and I shall speak slowly."

"Are you ready?"

Both bowed and Gaston Graydon said:

"Fire!"

At the word Rupert Sheldon fired.

At the shot Duncan Chatard stepped backward, raised his pistol, tossed his pearl-handled pocket-knife into the air and shivered it to pieces by the shot.

Again he had spared the life of Rupert Sheldon, and his wonderful shot showed how he

could have sent a bullet into the eye even of his foe, had he so desired.

A deathlike silence fell upon all, and then Rupert Sheldon stepped forward with extended hand.

"Duncan Chatard, how in the name of Heaven I missed you, I know not; but here is my hand, and I ask you to let the vendetta between us end this day."

"Gladly, sir, only too gladly; but you did not miss me, and I shall have to ask the services of your surgeon," and the duelist placed his hand over his heart.

As he did so, Gaston Graydon sprung toward him, but Rupert Sheldon caught him ere he fell.

Instantly his clothes were torn open and the surgeon examined the wound.

"My God! after such a wound he spared you and made that shot on the wing."

"A marvelous man indeed! but your days, I fear are numbered."

So said the surgeon as he gazed at the wound.

"So be it, sir, I have no fear of death," was the calm reply.

"For the love of God save his life, sir," cried Rupert Sheldon, now unnerved.

The duelist smiled and the surgeon probed the wound.

Instantly his face brightened.

"Ah, the rib glanced it off from the heart; but it is dangerous enough as it is."

"We must get you home, Mr. Chatard," and the Chatard carriage rolled rapidly home with its wounded master, the surgeon and Gaston Graydon.

CHAPTER LV.

WAYLAIN BY NIGHT.

DUNCAN CHATARD did not die of his wound. It was a severe one, and a mere chance was it that death had not followed.

But that chance saved him, and the surgeon cared for him by day and night, until he saw that he had passed the critical point.

Until that time Rupert Sheldon had remained in the city, a guest of his aunt's.

He was glad to remain, also, that he might care for Claude Scofield, who seemed to be clinging on to life but by a thread.

Every day a messenger from the Girard house stopped at the Chatard Mansion to ask about the wounded man.

That messenger was sent by Rupert Sheldon. After the duel he had returned to his hotel, and then had gone to the Girard Mansion to tell his sister all that had occurred.

She heard him in silence, and left the room without uttering a word.

But she felt, and what she suffered only herself knew.

When at last the duelist was reported out of danger, she urged that her husband be carried up to Gulf View.

The change would do him good, and so said the doctors.

So up to Gulf View she went with him, and her brother and a skilled surgeon accompanied them.

But upon her departure Irene wrote a note which was sent to the duelist's home, to be given him when he was able to read it.

One day Vim brought it in to him.

He was seated in an easy-chair by the window, very pale and wan, but gaining strength rapidly, and out of all danger.

He opened the envelope with fingers that trembled, for he knew the writing at a glance.

"Leave me," he said, and the negro departed.

Then he read Irene's note.

It was but a few lines.

"My appeal was not in vain.

"I could not have asked you to suffer as you did, after you had once spared his life.

"Heaven bless you, and remember that the prayers of a poor, unhappy woman will ever be offered up for you.

"This is my farewell to you, with the gratitude of my inmost soul."

There was no signature, but he read it over and over again, and from that day he grew better rapidly.

Planter Bernard had been most kind during his sufferings, and Anita had several times been to see him.

As Gaston Graydon had broken himself down in watching by the bedside of his friend, the duelist, had forced him to accept the urgent invitation of Pierre Bernard to go up to Orangelands and recuperate, and so the Virginian was enjoying life to its full extent, for he had discovered that there was no other woman in the world like Anita Bernard, and she was beginning to find out that she had surely lost her heart, but had gained another in its place.

One afternoon he rode down to a village some miles from Orangelands, to make a few purchases, and on the way had passed through a grove where half a dozen rough-looking men were gathered.

Their flat-boat lay moored to the bank, and one of them stopped and asked the young Virginian several questions, which were haughtily answered, for he did not like either the tone or the looks of the men.

He waited for the down boat at the village,

to get the mail, and it was night before he started upon his return.

He had forgotten all about the flat-boatmen until suddenly, as he was going through the timber, his horse was seized by the bridle-rein and a shot was fired almost in his face.

"Drag him off and kill him, mates!" cried a voice, and, athlete though he was, Gaston Graydon was dragged to the ground and knives gleamed before his eyes.

Another instant and the Virginian would have been a dead man, when suddenly two shots rung out, two men fell, and a tall form sprung to the rescue, and the others were dashed aside, giving Rupert Sheldon a chance to rise.

The men, thus surprised, fled to their boat, excepting the two who had fallen.

"Mount your horse, Mr. Graydon, and away, for they are a desperate lot, and more of them are on the boat."

"You know me?" cried Gaston Graydon, in surprise.

"Yes, but fly before it is too late."

"And you?"

"Oh, I'll take care of myself, never fear."

"I will not go without you."

"Come, spring up behind me."

The man hesitated an instant, then said:

"Mount, and I will."

The Virginian sprung into his saddle, for his horse had not left him, and the strange rescuer leaped up behind him.

Dashing spurs to his horse, the Virginian rode off just as half a dozen men came up over the levee and opened fire.

The horse was hit, but the two men seemed not to have been, and the next instant they were riding along through a dense undergrowth.

When they emerged into the starlight once more, the Virginian saw that he was alone.

His rescuer had disappeared.

Had he been wounded or killed by the fire, and fallen from his horse?

It seemed so, and the Virginian turned back.

But in the darkness of the thicket he could see nothing.

He heard the trampling of the feet of the men upon the deck of the flat-boat, loud commands, and then he saw a dark object move out upon the river.

Rapidly he rode to Orangelands, over a mile distant, but as he neared the gate his horse fell dead beneath him from the wound received.

Going on foot the rest of the way, he told Planter Bernard all that had happened, and the two were soon mounted and armed, riding back to the scene, while a wagon with a dozen negro men bearing lanterns followed.

The thicket was first reached, but the man who had saved the life of Gaston Graydon was not found.

The bodies of the two men from the flat-boat had been removed, and the boat was gone, fully half a dozen miles away down the stream by that time.

Nowhere was the man who had saved the Virginian to be found, and neither the planter or Gaston Graydon could understand who he was, why he had gone, or how it was that he had been there and known the one he had rescued by name.

"You did not know him?"

"It was too dark for me to see his face."

"He was a tall man, wore a beard, and seemed to be, as well as I could discover, dressed like the rest of the men."

"He certainly saved my life, but whether he was one of the crew or not I do not know."

"He called you by name?"

"Yes, more than once he did so."

So back to Orangelands they went, to tell Anita of the mysterious affair, and she was so much alarmed at the danger Gaston had been in, that she showed how dear he was to her, and he at once, in his joy, told his love to her, and asked her to be his wife.

Anita certainly did not refuse, so that the attack of two flat-boatmen upon the Virginian had a happy termination, after all.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE TUTOR'S STORY.

WHEN the one who had mounted behind Gaston Graydon in the woods, reached the thicket through which the road ran, he purposely slipped over the haunches of the horse to the ground.

He lay quiet until he was missed by the Virginian, and searched for, and had heard the flat-boatmen return to their boat and cast loose.

Then he arose and walked rapidly down the river road.

He walked well, and cast the miles rapidly behind him.

After walking for several hours, and passing through the deserted streets of the village, he came in sight of a plantation-house, situated upon the roadside, not very far distant.

He saw the gleam of a light, and thither he went.

The house was a large one, with two small cottages on either side, as is the custom often in the South, and about a hundred yards from the mansion.

It was in one of these that the light shone so brightly.

A gravel walk led up to the main house, and on either side were two walks, branching off to the cottages.

As he drew near the one with the light in it, the pedestrian stopped short and gazed within.

He saw a cosey room, and at a table on which stood a lamp sat a man reading.

The man's face was intelligent, but colorless, and he had the appearance of one who taxed himself with hard study.

But the traveler stepped up to the cottage door and knocked.

A moment after there was a step in the hall and the door opened.

It was a one-story house, with a large room on one side, which the light from the open door revealed to be used as a study hall, doubtless for the children of the planter.

Upon the other side were the sitting-room and bedroom of the person who had come to the door.

"Nat Winston, how are you?"

It was the traveler who spoke, and he stepped into the light as he did so.

The man addressed sprang back with a loud cry of alarm.

"My God! my God! I am a haunted man for the crime I committed!"

"Nat Winston, in the name of Heaven what ails you," and the stranger grasped his arm and shook him.

"Why, man, you must have been asleep."

"Come, don't you know me, old college chum?"

"Let me sit down," and the man staggered to a seat.

"In that wardrobe you will find a decanter of brandy."

"Give me a glass."

The visitor promptly obeyed and then took a seat near the man whom he had called Nat Winston.

"Now, I will talk to you, for you are flesh and blood, Harold Argyle?"

"Indeed I am, old fellow."

"You were not hanged, then?"

"Not I; do I look like it?"

"No, you look like flesh and blood; but you are haggard, your eyes are sunken and you have suffered."

"Suffered! my God, that does not tell the half, Nat."

"I can trust you, can I not, for I wish to tell you that I escaped from prison, and made my way down the river on a flat-boat until to-night."

"I was with a hard lot, Nat, and they plotted to kill a gentleman and rob him."

"He passed on his way to the village, for our boat was tied up, and the men saw his watch and chain, with a diamond pin he wore and supposed he had plenty of money, so they planned to kill him."

"I heard all, and I knew that they were no better than pirates, as they had often shown themselves, and I determined to save him."

"The man, Nat, was the brother of Gardner Graydon—"

"Gardner Graydon's brother?" gasped Nat Winston.

"Yes; but what ails you?"

"I'll tell you when I have heard your story."

"I could have been revengeful and let him die; but I went to his rescue, and had to kill two of the men to save him."

"I escaped with him, but slipped away in the darkness and walked on here."

"I saw your light, so came in, and recognized you through the window sitting here."

"I knew, for the sake of old times, you would not betray me, so I knocked."

"Betray you, Harold Argyle? Why, I did betray you!"

"Now, listen to my story, and you will know why I was so moved at sight of you."

"Thank Heaven, for the wrong done you I can now make recompense and ease my conscience!"

"You are dreaming, old fellow, for you never wronged me, and as for the money I loaned you, I never needed it."

"Ah, Harold, you do not know how I wronged you!"

"You were good to me, and loaned me the money I asked you for to keep me in college."

"Then, one day, I was seated in my room, just across the hall from yours."

"I saw Gardner Granger enter, heard all that passed, and saw the struggle."

"I saw him spring backward to draw his pistol, and pull the trigger himself ere he got it out of his breast-pocket, and—"

"God bless you for those words, Nat Winston!"

"He shot himself, as I saw, and I heard him say:

"I killed myself by accident, but you shall—"

"I heard no more, for I fled from my room."

"I had just had a letter giving me the place as tutor here in this family, and I did not wish to be held as a witness, and thus lose my position."

"I was a coward, and I caught the coach then about to start."

"I wrote to a fellow-student to pack up my traps and send them to me, which he did, and he wrote me that you were accused of the murder of Gardner Graydon, and would doubtless hang."

"I was here then, far from the scene, I owed you nearly a thousand dollars, and my accursed cowardice and avarice made me keep quiet when I should have spoken.

"I have not dared to look at a paper, and so it has gone on, while I have seen you hanged in my dreams night after night, and my life has been a torture.

"This is a happy home, and I love the daughter of the planter; all of the family are now absent on a visit to the city, and I am alone.

"But I will go now and confess my guilt against you, giving up all my hopes here in the South of prosperity and happiness.

"Nat, you did wrong me, and I nearly went to the gallows; but your words have given me so much joy that I will fully forgive you.

"Nay, I will protect you, Nat, from yourself, for you can go on to the town, state to the proper officials that you left just after the scene in my room, and did not wish to be held as a witness, and had no idea how severe would be the charge against me.

"That you had seen nothing about the affair until hearing of it but now, and had at once gone on to give your testimony in my behalf.

"I will gladly forgive you the debt, Nat, and will furnish you with ample means to carry you on.

"But I do wish you to make two visits besides to the town, and one is to my aged grandfather, the other to one whose address I will give you.

"To them I wish you to tell all, and how we met, for they will not betray you.

"Start to-morrow, Nat, while I go down to the city to await your coming back with a pardon for me, which you must bring from the governor ere I will dare face my fellow-men, for the noose is still about my neck, Nat."

"I pledge myself to the good work, Harold, and gladly.

"I will start to-morrow, and now you must accept my hospitality for the night, and to-morrow you can go on your way," and the tutor, with a glad smile upon his face, grasped the hand of the man he had so bitterly wronged.

CHAPTER LVII.

PARDONED.

THERE was great excitement in the town of — when Nat Winston arrived there and made oath to the scene he had witnessed in the rooms of Harold Argyle.

The officials went to the scene, saw where he had been at the time, and recognized that he had been able to view and hear all that had passed.

This showed that there was no murder, that Gardner Graydon had shot himself, while drawing his pistol, and in his venom was determined that his enemy should hang for it.

Then those who had condemned hung their heads and were glad that the prisoner had escaped.

Where was he?

That question Nat Winston would not answer, but armed with all papers in the case he went to the governor, and promptly received a pardon from him for Harold Argyle, for an offense that had not been committed.

After getting this Nat Winston went to Valley Vista and the joy that his story gave poor old Archer Argyle may be readily understood.

From there he went to Graydon Grange.

He got there the day after Colonel Graydon had been laid by the side of his forefathers, for at last his health had broken down.

Among the mourners were Gaston Graydon and his beautiful wife, Anita, nee Bernard, for, when called by letter to come to the bedside of his father, the young Virginian had urged Anita to become his wife and accompany him.

Urged as she was, and her father consenting, she had consented, and they had arrived in time for Gaston to be with his father in his last hours.

And to this house, which the shadow of death had just left, went Nat Winston the Southern tutor, and asked to see Eleanor.

She had asked to be excused; but he had written on his card:

"I bear a message to you I cannot intrust to another."

Then she went into the parlor and from the lips of Nat Winston heard the story of Harold Argyle's innocence.

Tears of joy came into her eyes, and she called to her brother and Anita who had just come into the house from carrying flowers to the grave of Colonel Graydon.

"Brother, I wish to present to you Mr. Winston."

"Mrs. Graydon, Mr. Winston."

Gaston and his wife wondered who it was that Eleanor had received; but she soon told them.

"Brother, you remember that I owed my life to our enemy, Mr. Harold Graydon, who was so nearly hanged for the murder of Gardner?"

"You may recall that I never believed him guilty."

"Mr. Winston will now tell you what he knows about the matter, and show you a pardon from the governor for Harold Argyle."

Gaston Graydon listened in deep silence and with mortification.

He was not a man to wrong any one, and he said:

"I am heartily glad that it is so."

"And Mr. Winston, will you tell how it was that you met Mr. Argyle, and who the stranger is that my brother here owes his life to?"

Gaston Graydon was almost unnerved when he heard who it was that had recognized him and saved him that night from the flat-boat pirates.

"Mr. Winston," he said, with emotion. "You of course know where your friend is."

"I will write a letter to him, which I beg you to carry, telling him that he, not I, is the wronged one, and asking him to let the Virginia vendetta sleep forever in the grave of the past, for I, the last of my race, am his friend."

Such a letter did Nat Winston, after two days passed at Graydon Grange, bear with him back to Harold Argyle, who awaited him in the City of New Orleans.

And he carried another letter.

It was from Eleanor Graydon.

It told Harold Argyle of her joy at his good fortune, and then it told him of her life, the mock-marriage which had turned out to be real, and who it was that he owed his escape to.

She hid nothing, told all, and then said in the end:

"And thus we must part, Harold, never to meet again."

In a secluded quarter of the town, where he kept in hiding, Harold Argyle was found by Nat Winston, and the letters and the pardon given him.

Then the two parted, the tutor to return to his duties at the plantation home where Harold Argyle had found him.

And to the home of the duelist went Harold Argyle.

Duncan Chatard had almost wholly recovered and was gaining strength rapidly.

He received his visitor, greeted him cordially, and then listened to the good news he had to tell about himself.

Then the duelist said:

"Mr. Argyle, you came here to thank me and then go your way, leaving Eleanor to me."

"Let me tell you that our cases in life are strangely alike."

"You are one of a family who have been sorely hurt by a cruel vendetta."

"I am the same."

"You have loved the lady of the name you have been taught to hate."

"I have done the same, for Eleanor is not my first love, and only when one other was lost to me forever, did I ask her to publicly become my wife."

"Three days ago I learned of the death of Captain Claude Scofield."

"He has been lying ill for a long time, from a wound I gave him in a duel."

"It has just caused his death, up at Gulf View, the home of the Sheldons on Bay St. Louis."

"Since his death I am determined that his wife, my old love, shall become my wife."

"But first I must get a divorce from Eleanor."

"This we can arrange, for both of us will put in papers, and secretly have the marriage annulled."

"Thank God!" broke from the lips of Harold Argyle.

"As she does not love me, other than she might as a brother, and does love you, this will be readily arranged, while I, loving Mrs. Scofield, and assured of her love for me, will be happy in the severance of the tie that binds me to my present wife, if I may so put it."

"Mr. Chatard," said Harold Argyle, with deep emotion, "you are a noble man, and I will tell you a secret known to only Eleanor and myself."

"Against all we loved each other, and when she was visiting some friends in Baltimore, I begged her to secretly become my wife."

"She consented, hoping that we could perhaps win our families over."

"She drove to a clergyman's, and there I met her, and we were secretly married, as we both believed, for we knew not of your prior claim."

"There we parted, and I have never seen her since."

"This is our secret, sir, and which she dared not tell you."

"My dear Argyle, be my guest for a few days while I get these divorce papers started, and then I will accompany you to Virginia, for the change will help me."

"What do you say?"

"Willingly."

"Now let me write a letter that I must send to Mrs. Scofield."

"So soon."

"Ah, yes, for she must know that she is to become my wife and never enter a convent's walls."

That night Vim started for Gulf View Plantation, and he bore a letter from his master to Irene Scofield.

CHAPTER LVIII.

BURYING THE HATCHET.

IRENE had gone to the grave of her husband with an armful of flowers.

She had walked leisurely down the road and had reached the burying-ground while the sun was yet an hour high.

There were the graves of her kindred many in number.

But there was the grave of her brother who had fallen by the hand of Duncan Chatard, and where they, the duelist and himself had met.

Then there was her father's grave, and he too had fallen under the fire of Duncan Chatard.

The newly-made grave, with flowers upon it, covered the remains of her husband.

He had gradually faded out of life, and died happy that he at least could call her wife.

She had felt, the day he died, that the grave hid from her a secret.

But she had her secret, too, and she did not murmur.

The next day she had been looking over his papers, as he had asked her to do.

All were systematically arranged and labeled.

A box lay at her hand, and opening it she saw the shattered morocco case, the bullet-dented miniature that had turned the ball from his heart that day.

There was a note in the box with it.

She saw that it was addressed to

"MISS HELENE HERNDON,
"Ellicott's Mills,
"Maryland."

Then upon it was written:

"To be delivered in person."

The letter she read. It was written in a strange hand.

It was as follows:

"MY OWN DEAR HELENE:—

"When this reaches your hand, I will be dead!

"An Indian arrow-wound, received in battle, is killing me."

"The bearer is Captain Claude Scofield, my commander and a noble fellow."

"I have asked him to wear this next his heart, as I have done, until he returns it to you with my dying love."

"He so pledges himself to do."

"I can write no more, for the hand of death is upon me, and know that my last thought shall be of you, ever true and good."

"Farewell!"

"Your devoted

"FRANK."

Then on the bottom of the note was written in her husband's hand:

"I wrote to Miss Helene Herndon, and received reply that she had eloped with her music-teacher."

"Such was her love for the noble fellow who died in my arms."

"I kept my pledge and wore her miniature, and it saved my life."

So the secret of "Helene's miniature" was out. For some reason, perhaps an oversight, her husband had never spoken to her about it.

And over this did Irene muse as she stood by her husband's grave.

Then she turned sadly away; but her love was not buried there.

Just then a negro horseman came along the road, travel-stained from a long journey.

He took off his hat, sprung from his horse and handed to her a letter.

It was Vim, and she knew who had sent him.

She took the letter, broke the seal and turned to the sunset, but to shield her face.

She read:

"My sympathy in your sorrow, for what you suffer I feel."

"One year from to-day I shall come to ask you to be my wife."

DUNCAN CHATARD."

This was all.

There was no request for an answer, only those few lines.

"Any answer, miss?"

"No."

Vim mounted and rode back the way he had come.

Irene went on to the mansion, and her thoughts were in a tumult.

CONCLUSION.

HAROLD ARGYLE was accompanied to his home by Duncan Chatard, the duelist, and Archer Argyle had never known a happier day than that on which his son returned.

It was the duelist who went to Graydon Grange and buried the hatchet between the homes of Graydon and Argyle, thus paving the way for Eleanor to become the wife of Harold when, some months after, the divorce papers arrived, severing the tie that bound her to Duncan Chatard.

And to Valley Vista, the place where for so long had dwelt the enemies of her race, went Eleanor with her husband, while Gaston retained Graydon Grange with his beautiful bride from the far sunny South.

After long months of wandering, the duelist again turned his steps homeward.

His grand old mansion was fitted up from cellar to garret, and one day he sailed in his yacht for Gulf View.

"The year has passed, Irene, I have come for my answer," he said, when the two met in the parlors of the mansion.

"I will no longer fight against Fate, Duncan."

"I will be your wife," was the answer.

And Rupert Sheldon gave the bride away, and thus was buried the Two Vendettas.

THE END.

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